

Statement of the Committee to Reimagine SFAI

The Committee to Reimagine SFAI was created by the board of trustees in July 2020 and charged with proposing revisions to the school's structure that would make it healthier, more vibrant, and more effective. Our work was to be phased in beginning in September 2021. We were instructed that "everything was on the table." In other words, there was no proposal we could make that would be too radical for SFAI to consider.

Since July, we have put in countless hours of work towards our charge. We've held hundreds of committee and subcommittee meetings and half-day retreats, we've stayed in steady communication with the constituencies we represent, and we've drawn upon generous contributions of time and wisdom from numerous experts from inside and outside the SFAI family. We have held several town halls including one in early November where we presented our work in progress to the SFAI community. We have operated as a community of equals, speaking and listening with respect and sharing a dedication to SFAI.

Through our work, we have devised a vision for the future of SFAI, including a set of consensuses about pedagogy, governance, sustainability, finances, fundraising, marketing, and meaningful access to what SFAI has to offer. We feel the conventional model of higher art education is broken in ways that disproportionately harm BIPOC students and we have built all of our recommendations with this in mind. We have collectively formulated tools to guide implementation of this vision, such as agreements about how to engage in effective dialog, flowcharts and guiding principles for decision making, and financial models to assess the viability of any plan.

Before the board tasked us with our work, it took on a commitment of its own: to raise \$4.5 million dollars this fiscal year. The board pledged to us and to the SFAI community that it would raise \$1.3 million at an art auction in November and it would pave the path for the school to receive \$2.5 million in unrestricted cash donations in the first half of 2021. And the board promised the Re-Imagine Committee co-chairs that it would start the 2021/22 fiscal year with financial resources to implement the plans. On the basis of these commitments by the board, we accepted our charge. Thereafter, the school resumed operations and enrolled students, promising those students that while there was some risk for the fall of 2021, the school was on a solid financial foundation for this fiscal year.

The board has not fulfilled its commitment to SFAI and the school now stands in worse financial shape than it was in January 2020. When we met with members of the board on Monday, January 10, we were told that the auction has been postponed until March, a prominent alum has pulled her work from it, and the revenue expectations have been revised downward to less than half of the original goal. At the same meeting, we were told that expectations for fundraising in the spring of 2021 have been cut from \$2.5 million to \$700,000.

While we acknowledge the efforts made by individual board members to carry out the board's obligations, by any objective measure, the board's plan has failed. In an effort to avoid insolvency, the board is now spending restricted funds from the endowment in what we fear may be a violation of California law. Just as in January 2020, the school is planning to begin its spring semester knowing it is likely facing a cash shortfall before the end of the term. Unlike January 2020, we believe there is no plan being pursued for merger with another institution.

Although the board is stating publicly that it believes the Diego Rivera mural must stay in place at the Chestnut Street campus, it has actively pursued a buyer who intends to remove the mural and relocate it to a planned museum in Los Angeles. Moreover, the board has opposed the granting of landmark status for the mural because it wishes to borrow funds using the mural as collateral in order to fund current operations. We feel this plan would put the mural in jeopardy, in part because the board has not shown how it would pay off a loan against the mural – or indeed any loan.

For reasons we have explained to the board in a written memorandum, on December 30 we invited the board to make a change in board leadership that could have easily been implemented. This proposal was rejected, and the board canceled our long-scheduled January 7 presentation to the board. The board is now rallied around an operations plan which we believe does not have a viable financial path forward. Even if that plan were to succeed, it would replicate problems at SFAI which we oppose, such as high acceptance rates, high tuition, and low wages for staff and faculty. Moreover, the way in which the board is proceeding is inconsistent with our consensus values concerning good governance.

For these reasons, we don't believe it would be productive for us to work with the board as it is currently constituted. We presented an overview of our work to the SFAI community at a town hall today, and it is our intention to create an archive of our work in the hopes that it can be helpful to SFAI in the future. Because we are formally constituted as a committee of the board, the Reimagine Committee will dissolve – although individual members of the committee may continue to work towards a healthy future for SFAI.

We thank the SFAI community for their support of the Reimagine Committee. We wish the board and administration the best of luck in facing the challenges they are now up against. Above all, we send our deepest regards to the students of SFAI. Whatever may happen this spring, we welcome you to the SFAI family.

The Committee to Reimagine SFAI
January 14, 2021