

SCHOOL OF ART ASSESSMENT
M.A., M.S. in Art

May 2019

This document is intended to be both reflective and forward looking. It illustrates a moment in time, but also acknowledges its own elasticity and changeability. Assessment in the School of Art does not fit into a traditional model, just as some of art's practices and procedures eschew many academic paradigms. A collaborative effort between School of Art faculty and administration, this document was initiated by posing a series of questions, such as *What does it mean to succeed in a studio course, art history course, graphic design course, art teacher education course? How does a student receive a passing grade and how is his/her learning measured? What tools are used to disseminate information, inspire independent thinking, and encourage students to make connections between concepts introduced in their courses? What might improve students' learning experience?*

MA in Art - Visual Culture

Graduate students in the MA program must perform successfully in the degree's three required core courses: Art 475 (Graduate Seminar in Visual Culture), Art 478 (Introduction to Critical Theory), and Art 497 (Introduction to Research Methodology). Visual Culture graduate students also take Art 499 (Thesis Work) as well as other Art History/Visual Culture courses and coursework outside of the School of Art, such as anthropology or history. They must also fulfill a language requirement. Student performance is measurable by grades of C or better. It is also assessed by the demonstrated ability to conduct research and work independently, contextualize ideas and concepts specific to the field of visual culture and the focus of the thesis, and communicate these ideas successfully both verbally and in writing.

In order to proceed through the Visual Culture program, by the end of their second semester students must form a thesis committee and subsequently submit a thesis proposal that provides an overview of their research topic(s) and the intended methodological approaches along with a chapter outline and bibliography. The thesis committee must approve the thesis proposal. At the beginning of the fourth semester, the thesis committee administers a comprehensive exam, which consists of a written take-home test of three essay questions. The three questions are developed by the thesis committee in consultation with the student. They are specific to each student, and revolve around the student's thesis research interests.

The MA thesis is an original work of research in the field of Visual Culture. To successfully defend it, students must clearly and fluently discuss the ideas, methods, goals and achievements of the research in the thesis. Completion of the thesis is measurable by support from the thesis committee and the Graduate School.

MS in Art – Art Teacher Education (ATE)

Graduate students in the MS program must perform successfully in the degree's required courses: Art 401 (Foundations in Art Education), Art 402 (Issues in Art Education), Art 403 (Curriculum in Art Education), Art 475 (Graduate Seminar in Visual Culture), Art 478 (Introduction to Critical Theory), and Art 497 (Introduction to Research Methodology). Their performance is measurable by grades of C or better. MS students who are seeking licensure are actually working on dual degrees: an MS in Art Teacher Education and a BA in Art Teacher Education (the BA contains the licensure requirements). These students can use the 300 level courses that they take towards licensure as electives for their MS.

MS students gather and use knowledge of historical and contemporary art education and education theory to create and teach curriculum. They also conduct meaningful research that is informed by current research in art education, such as assessment, disability rights, technology, arts advocacy, socio-economic impact on education, and government regulation of education.

In Fall 2017, there was a change in the requirements for an MS in Art Education: students can now choose to take a comprehensive exam or write a thesis. They do not have to do both. However, each student must be able to form a graduate committee.

In order to complete their graduate thesis, MS students conduct a research study with Institutional Research Board (IRB) permission; write a thesis proposal that includes research questions; proposed methodology and an extensive literature review of the area to be studied; note deficiencies that can be fulfilled by their research; conduct research; write and revise a thesis that includes the research questions, methodology, literature review, findings, and analysis; and pass an oral defense of the thesis investigations. Each of these outcomes is measurable by the support of the student's graduate committee.

There are other concrete, measurable outcomes in Art Education associated with licensure, namely the Illinois Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) and the Illinois K-12 Content Exam.

Indirect Assessment

Faculty discuss student learning informally: in friendly conversation, comparing teaching methods, or even talking about how students they share process information and perform differently in different courses. Less casual discussion might occur in the context of curricular revision or student retention.

In other contexts, such as area meetings and studio discipline meetings/critiques, student perceptions of their learning are gathered by faculty and considered on a micro-level. For example, at the end of each semester, the printmaking faculty meet individually with their graduates and advanced students to recap the semester and look toward the future. This is a good time to ask students about the overall quality of their experience and how assessment enhances it or detracts from it.

Another manner to collect feedback, especially undergraduate feedback, is through student response forms; students are asked to describe the extent of their learning in a course as well as faculty grading. By extension, faculty can also address student perceptions of their learning in annual dossiers.

Gathering and studying student perceptions of their learning necessitates tracking students who have graduated. Again, this is an informal process. Faculty who have established long-lasting relationships with their students are a kind of student tracking device, and faculty who are contacted as references can stay abreast of student goals, activities, and accomplishments. Social media is another informal way to keep in touch with alumni.

In any way the School of Art gathers information about student perceptions of their learning - or about their lives in general - there is currently a focus on student successes rather than those who do

not continue to make art, teach, or work in art related fields.

There are certainly many ways to gage “success” among School of Art alumni; creative problem-solving skills, work ethic, analytical ability, and professional bravery are strengths in many facets of the working world. Art students learn and possess a plethora of transferable skills and these often go unnoticed if the only recognized goal is graduating students who continue to work in creative or visual art fields.

The School of Art has worked with Alumni Relations to survey alumni, but with very little response and not in recent years. Generating a tool to survey or track School of Art alums would not be easy, and building a reliable, thorough database of alumni contact information would also be quite difficult. Nevertheless, learning more about alums could benefit the School of Art immeasurably.

Assessment Sustainability

The word “assessment” is not part of the everyday vocabulary of the faculty, staff, or administration of the School of Art. The only area that truly understands its meaning, outside of its dictionary definition, is Art Teacher Education because of assessment’s essential nature in state licensure. School of Art faculty assess. However, assessment is not discussed, tracked, or addressed in ways that may be commonplace in other schools and departments on campus. If this document is to be used, kept up to date, and adopted into School of Art culture, the onus is on the faculty, staff, and administration. The worth of those efforts has yet to be determined.

For better or worse, the School of Art has established itself as an exception to many of the actualities of University culture. One small example is that most faculty shun their academic titles in class; students and faculty address each other using first names. This is perhaps a result of the small studio classes. In the facilities in the Center for Visual Arts, there can be as few as 8 or as many as sixteen in a hands-on, process intensive class such as ceramics or printmaking. Another example is discussed in the section “MFA in Studio Art.” At the end of their three-year program, MFA studio students exhibit their thesis body of art work. The accompanying statement, which can be upwards of 30 pages, is approved by the Graduate School and published by ProQuest along with the written theses and dissertations of other graduate students. However, the faculty make it clear to the students that the art work is their thesis, which they present and discuss during their thesis defense. Furthermore, faculty debate with and relate to their students, and each other, in a way that might not exist in the College of Business or the College of Nursing; the creative nature of artistic practice encourages its participants to be different, to stand out. Some might even call the School of Art abnormal.

This document is the first of its kind in the School of Art, so its continued use and sustainability are largely unexplored. In its writing, it has already been of use; faculty have put into words the hurdles, modes of evaluation, and goals for students and the resulting self-studies are united into one end-product. This exercise, in and of itself, is of use. Further uses are up for debate.

This document can apply to curricular/programmatic research and revision. In studying assessment, part of the exercise is looking at *how* students are encouraged to learn. One might also ask *what* students learn, and what might be missing in their educational experience. Recently, after a faculty-

wide conversation, faculty started to require that their students attend artist lectures at University Galleries. The School of Art has an extensive line-up of lectures scheduled every year; visiting artists, faculty, visiting curators, and artists exhibiting in University Galleries share their research with the general public. However, students are often absent at these lectures and miss out on seeing artwork, hearing about the studio practice and ideas of others, and understanding what their faculty do when not in the classroom. Requiring attendance and a written response encourages students to think beyond their immediate experience, see examples of successful artists, and perhaps even set professional goals.

This document can also be used as a recruitment and informational tool. The faculty have already discussed using excerpts to address and introduce assessment to potential students, especially those who are looking at the MFA Studio program. However, at this time it seems that the most obvious use for this document is to prove to the University that the School of Art does indeed employ assessment in its programs.