

Major Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Art
Undergraduate Programs
AY 2008-09 through AY 2012-13

Assessment Measures

The Department of Art uses the following measures to assess departmental learning outcomes:

Direct Measures	Indirect Measures
<p>Art History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Seminar Grades • Senior Theses Papers • Senior Exhibitions (if available) • Pass rates on Comprehensive Examinations 	<p>Art History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades, course evaluations (when available), and enrollment totals • Job placements • Graduate school placement rates • Alumni Surveys
<p>Studio Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Seminar Grade • Senior Studio Art Projects • Critique Presentation/Participation • Senior Exhibition 	<p>Studio Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades, course evaluations (when available), and enrollment totals • Job placements • Graduate school placement rates

Assessment Findings

The data for the Department of Art is small and limited. Statistics presented through graphs and charts provides only a blunt instrument for charting the successes and challenges that we and our students have faced over the past five years. The Department will provide curriculum details and specific examples of achievements and obstacles faced to elucidate the learning outcomes of our majors.

Art History and Studio Art analysis will be provided separately as each of these areas of study are wholly different in both the preparation and completion of their capstone experiences, and in their learning assessments. Student performance in each of these areas varied depending on many factors. These included non-academic variables, such as pre-collegiate training.¹

¹ Over the past five years, we have seen genuine extremes in the academic weaknesses and strengths of our students; this has had a real, often negative, impact on the classroom and studio experience of all of our students, perhaps especially for the students at both the high and the low extremes of the learning curve. Greater consistency and selectivity in admission standards at CUA could remedy this problem. While personal problems and financial resources are often a significant factor in any student's success in college, the latter became a crucial concern for a number of our students in the wake of the financial crash of 2008. It resulted in at least two of our majors leaving CUA before graduation to transfer to a cheaper university; and in three instances, it caused students to struggle with balancing full course work and the part-time jobs needed to help fund their education.

Senior Seminar Discussion

In this report, the Department of Art will analyze enrollment data, evaluations, and course grades for ART 451A *Art History Senior Seminar* and ART 451 *Studio Art Senior Seminar* for the given five-year period (fall 2008 through fall 2012).

Analysis of the Art History Capstone Experience (Attachment I)

Enrollment Data, Evaluations, and Grades

During this period enrollment in ART 451A *Art History Senior Seminar* spanned from 1 student to 4 students. The students were taught by Dr. Nora Heimann from late-August through mid-October in fall 2008. Dr. Heimann took personal leave mid-semester to care for a dying parent, and a substitute instructor, Dr. Lisa Lipinski, stepped in and became the professor of record for fall 2008. From fall 2009 to fall 2012, Dr. Heimann instructed all the senior art history majors. Her instructor rating ranged from 8.50 to 10.00 out of a 10 point scale.² Student grades ranged from As to Cs.

Curriculum Details

The senior art history capstone normally has three central components: (1) reading and interpreting major critical methodologies; (2) drafting, revising, and completing a senior thesis in the form of an 18-20 page paper; (3) and meeting professionals in the field. In the given five-year time period, the department also experimented with adding a fourth component in which the seniors assisted in mounting a special exhibition. This curatorial opportunity was an experiment intended to provide the students with exceptional hands-on professional experience, enhancing their readiness for the workplace after graduation. This option was offered to every senior class from 2010 to 2012. In each of these three years, the students voted unanimously to assist with curating an exhibition.³ While the exhibitions were a success (as will be discussed below), there were compromises that were necessary to fit this new component into the senior seminar syllabus.

Undergraduate Research as Practical Experience: The Exhibition Experiment

In fall 2010, all three seniors assisted with key phases of organizing a group alumni art exhibition: students assisted with drafting short and extended wall labels texts; they interviewed artists; they developed social media, designed branding, and drafted press releases.⁴ This added capstone component proved very significant for one third of the class's post-graduate success landing one student an important job in the competitive field of contemporary art sales. All of the seniors expressed immense enthusiasm for this real-world, pre-professional, and research-oriented experiment. However, mounting the exhibition was also stressful and intensely time-demanding for all concerned. It required reorganizing the capstone syllabus, compressing the timetable of requirements, reducing the number of readings, and shorting the length of the senior thesis.

In fall 2011, all four seniors assisted with mounting an exhibition. To allow the students more time to develop their senior thesis, this experience was simplified to a solo installation. Students assisted by drafting wall labels, interviewing the artist, advertising via social media, and providing tours for the exhibition.⁵ Student enthusiasm for this project was uniformly strong, affirming it as a positive experience. For one of the students, it played a key role in attaining employment in the field directly after graduation; for another student it appears to have helped with graduate school admission the year after graduation. As was the case in 2010, however, mounting an exhibition was time-demanding and thereby stressful. When one of the students ended up having to take an incomplete, the

² When graduating class sizes were particularly small, some students elected not to complete course evaluations; this presumably was due to some students' concerns regarding lack of anonymity.

³ In academic year 2013 to 2014 – not covered by this report – one student did not wish to participate in this project; in our next report, we will explain how this was handled.

⁴ All preliminary work for this exhibition, entitled *Crafting a Legacy: A Half Century of Art at CUA*, was carried out by department faculty, including conceptualizing and scheduling the exhibition, arranging loans with the artists, and selecting pieces.

⁵ For this exhibition, *Reza Ghand: Meta*, all preliminary arrangements (including selecting the artist) were carried out by the department.

department became even more concerned about whether or not adding this component made the senior capstone too taxing.

In fall 2012, the solitary senior assisted in curating an exhibition that was designed to complement other important university-sponsored events.⁶ The student wrote all wall labels and assisted with collection development; she also drafted the press release; and assisted with all aspects of the opening celebration. As was the case in 2010 and 2011, the time pressures required to prepare a professional show for a public audience made this curatorial experience stressful for the student as well as the faculty mentor. In an effort to address that problem, it was decided that the senior thesis would be completed in the spring in lieu of the student taking comprehensive examinations.

Conclusions

These exhibition experiences provided wholly practical professional skills for students interested in gallery practices and museum work. It also helped forge important relationships between students, alumni, and professionals in the area who were engaged to assist and support projects in three years during this time period. These connections led to internships for two seniors at prestigious museums. The research aspects of these curatorial experiences were also a deciding factor in two students' admission to leading graduate programs in gallery and museum studies. In this way, these capstone experiences were clearly positive. Yes at the same time, they also placed stress on the students. Some seniors struggled to balance the academic demands of their senior seminar while also completing the additional work associated with these exhibitions.

Recent alumni who have completed these capstone experiences have unanimously expressed gratitude for the exhibition component. They have noted its importance to learn essential post-graduate professional skills needed to obtain and maintain curatorial and administrative positions in galleries and museums.

Aware of the financial strains the university is under. These experiences were only made possible through special funds provided generously by the Dean of Arts & Sciences. We hope that in the future the student research in curating may continue to be a component of the senior seminar, ideally as a two track system capstone senior seminar separates the intense academic element of critical methodology and thesis research and writing and the practical gallery experience providing students with even greater art history comprehension and professional gallery skills. It could also serve to make our small department more distinctive and competitive in attracting new students to the university. This solution to balancing the demands of the capstone experience would only be possible if additional funding for the new capstone could be found.

Analysis of Studio Art Capstone Experience (Attachment II)

Enrollment Data, Evaluations, and Grades

In the given time period, the enrollment of studio art majors in ART 451 *Senior Studio Art Coordinating Seminar* has ranged from 0 to 6. Mr. John Figura has taught ART 451 *Senior Studio Art Coordinating Seminar* all four semesters it was offered. His instructor ratings have ranged from 7.75 to 10.00 on a 10 point scale. (For reasons unknown to the department, students in fall 2010 either neglected or elected not to complete the course evaluations.)

Curriculum Details

ART 451 *Senior Studio Art Coordinating Seminar* worked to expose students to most important contemporary exhibitions in the DC area. It utilized virtual exhibitions for work outside the region. The seminar included specialized readings and projects tailored to the specific needs and concentrations of the students to foster greater visual literacy and development of their work. Seniors' assessment in the course was based on a composite of requirements including; primary research on artists' artworks and ideas directly related to their own senior projects;

⁶ The student curated exhibition, *To Believe – The Spirited Art of Corita*, was held in Mullen Library; it was timed to coincide with both an exhibition curated by the department entitled *Celebrating Vatican II - A Spirited Response in Art & Design*, and a symposium entitled *Reform and Renewal: Vatican II after Fifty Years*, that was hosted by the School of Theology and Religious Studies. The department handled all financial and logistical aspects; library staff assisted with the installation of the objects.

development of their senior project; presentations in front of faculty; and written responses to looking and reading assignments.

Students' success has varied from A to B grades. A number of reoccurring factors that limited the success of the students include the following: art majors are the minority in studio art classes, temporary instructors who teach studio art majors find it difficult to grade in a manner that did not reward attendance and completion of assignments so students are sometimes unknowingly unprepared for their senior seminar. Truly fine art requires dedication, inspiration, and profound commitment; few students have the desire to foster those capabilities within themselves. A disproportional number of students who attained excellent standards could have gone to an art school that offered courses geared towards majors rather than students looking to fulfill electives. Most of these students elected to remain because their education was fully funded through their parents who were on the faculty or staff (this remains true for even the last 20 years of data). We were grateful that they were in the classes; they elevated the tenor of the courses they took and created inspiration for their peers. We only wish that others admitted to the university were of the same caliber.

The inclusion of faculty critiques (requiring additional resources from the university – for which we are very grateful – and considerable time on the part of the faculty) has been tremendously helpful in pushing students towards their full potential by raising expectations and accountability.

Many studio art majors lack the opportunity to compete with area institutions for MFA programs resultantly only one or two of our students have gone on to complete graduate studies. To truly be competitive with area graduates they are majors need more than 14 courses in the major.

Intermediate/Introductory Course Data

The Department of Art analyzed course grades, evaluations, and enrollment data in ART 361 *Art History Junior Seminar* and ART 353 *Studio Art Junior Seminar* for the five-year period (fall 2008 through fall 2012).

We have long understood how students succeed in their senior year is dependent on their earlier semesters at CUA, that is why we are very grateful for junior seminar, we wish we had the resources to provide more major-only courses on the sophomore level. We also wish we could include portfolio review at the admissions level that would make students aware of their limitations and be prepared for portfolio reviews as a point of analysis in later semesters.

Introductory and Intermediate Art History Courses (Attachment III)

Enrollment Data, Evaluations, and Grades

The introduction of ART 361 *Junior Art History Seminar* in spring 2011 has provided the students with an introduction to critical theory, skills to assess and summarize readings, and enhanced reading and analytic skills. The course enrollment has ranged in the three year period 2011 – 2013 from 1 to 4 students.

Dr. Nora Heimann taught ART 361 all three semesters that it was offered. Here instructor ratings were 8.25 with a standard deviation of 2.06 on a 10 point scale in spring 2011. (For reasons unknown to the department, students in spring 2012 and spring 2013 either neglected or elected not to complete the course evaluations.) The grades have ranged from As to Bs. The course required students to complete a junior thesis and read and analyze critical art theory. The thesis prepares the students for creating a more structured, coherent, and stronger senior thesis in the following semester.

Curriculum Details

The junior seminar is a wake-up call for the individual students to self-identify the gaps in their learning. Students are provided with a variety of methodological critical readings presented in a historically chronological format; students are more aware when they begin to prepare for their comprehensive examinations (usually held in spring of senior year). The junior seminar provided students with the opportunity to learn how to read primary, secondary, and tertiary texts more closely, and to learn how to use these different types of resources in their own research. Junior

seminar was a writer's boot camp, teaching and reinforcing; how to pick a focused thesis topic; how to develop their topic through research; how to form a logical argument in support of their topic; and how to use their chosen resources well.

Weaknesses in the introductory and intermediate art history courses as offered by the department of art largely manifested themselves by the lack of stability in the department faculty. The department worked through one full-time faculty member and many visiting instructors (the majority who remain no more than four semesters). At its best these instructors provided the department with key courses dependent on their area of concentration and expertise. They often provided our students with connections to area museums and institution. A special three year relationship with Dr. Orgu Dalgic, Dumbarton Oaks fellow fall 2009 to spring 2012, provided students a hands-on instruction to the art and artifacts in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum. This exquisite experience offered the department three years of intensive study in the areas of Islamic, Early Christian, and Byzantine studies. David Gariff has been an ongoing resource for the department; he has helped students find internships often leading to job placements. These particular cases were very successful for both instructors and students alike. These are the best examples, but we can provide other instances where instructors were awkward, dry, and boring. While the department has tried to hire the best instructors, low salaries and poor facilities has made this task difficult. Often an instructor will teach for one or two semesters and then leave CUA for a full-time position at another institution. This more common experience leads to an inconsistency as to the topics which the department can offer as we are dependent of the expertise that the visiting instructors bring the department.

There is also a very inconsistent quality of student. The students can be exceptionally bright, insightful, intelligent, articulate; conversely some students have been academically weak, lacking in basic writing and reading skills, and have identified issues in learning. The disparate spectrum of students can create difficult situations for instructors when they have to teach both types of student in the same classroom. Instructors end up teaching in the middle of the road, unable to challenge the exceptionally bright, nor particularly boost and assist those lacking in foundational skills. This issue is visible not only within the major but also across all art history courses.

Introductory and Intermediate Studio Art Courses (Attachment IV)

Enrollment Data, Evaluations, and Grades

In the given time period, fall 2008 to fall 2012, the enrollment of ART 353 *Junior Studio Art Seminar* has ranged from 1 to 7 students. Mr. John Figura has taught ART 353 all four semesters it was offered. His instructor ratings have ranged 7.00 to 9.17 on a 10 point scale. Grades of the students have ranged from As to a single F (due to a personal matters in which the student withdrew from the university).

Curriculum Details

The inclusion of ART 353 *Junior Studio Art Seminar* as started in fall 2006 has continued to provide the students with the ability to create a complex project junior year as well as a stronger senior project. ART 353 was the first course that students take that was restricted to majors-only. As a majors-only course, instructors were able to teach to a higher standard. Adding courses restricted to major-only, perhaps including a sophomore seminar, would provide our students with earlier momentum.

ART 353 also provided faculty with the ability to spot weaknesses in the students' education and technical abilities. Many of the weaknesses that the department has found within the studio art major have come from the lack of course availability. The department being restricted, as all Art & Sciences majors, to 14 courses finds that our students lack the experience that comes with time in the studio. Additional 'ART' classes would provide our students with a greater preparedness for both junior and senior seminars as well as post-graduation academic and professional plans.

Milestone Data

Art History & Studio Art (Attachment V)

The Department of Art has enjoyed a 100% pass rate for both Art History and Studio Art comprehensive. We believe that the junior seminar for both Art History and Studio Art majors have contributed to the 100% pass rate.

Art History students from fall 2008 to fall 2011 completed written senior comprehensive examinations. The exam is divided into three sections, Part I (Ancient and Medieval), Part II (Renaissance and Baroque) and Part III (Modern and Contemporary). The students have two hours for each part to answer three questions in essay format. The rubric for the written art history comprehensive exam was revised in February 2012 to prioritizing art history knowledge (traits 1 & 2) above effective and proper use of English (traits 3 & 4).⁷ In fall 2012, the solitary senior curated an exhibition in place of taking written comprehensive examinations. Please see *Analysis of the Art History Capstone Experience* above for more information.

Studio Art majors complete a Senior Studio Art Thesis. The project is completed over the course of one academic year and is graded through a series of eight critiques. At each critique the student presents their research, progress on the project to date, and a preliminary and then revised artist statement (akin to a thesis statement). These students are then graded by all faculty members present including their two project advisors and overseeing project coordinator. In fall 2011 the grading timeline was changed to weight the grades associated with the completion of the project more heavily than the preliminary research and proposal for the project. In 2010 and 2012 the timetable provided to the students in the beginning of their fall semester was revised to include greater detail as to the expectations that were held by the department

The department of art continually seeks to enhance and improve the capstone experience, revising and clarifying expectations, for both art history and studio art majors to maximize the students' success.

Curricular Improvements

Art History

As explained above in *Analysis Art History Capstone Experience* and *Milestone Data* the department of art has been introducing an exhibition experience as part of the senior's curriculum. In two instances the exhibition was included in ART 451A *Art History Senior Seminar* in one instance it replaced written comprehensive examinations. We clearly see the benefits and success of this new component but are frankly unresolved on how to proceed due to the stress that it has placed on the students and are seeking wisdom external to the department.

Art Studio

Since 2005 one faculty member has sought to gain for the department a Mac lab with advanced digital software and a Master Program. During this effort to create Master's Program she bought in contractual consultant who assisted in looking at national and international data. The program that developed would have been unique in the area but the construction of the digital lab was delayed and in the delay other area universities created similar programs. After many years of effort the department was able to build a digital art lab, create an undergraduate certificate, and was approved for a new tenure track faculty member. The certificate provides to all students at CUA the ability to hone their skills in digital art in preparation for internships as well as post-graduate careers for all disciplines.

In spring 2012 the department faculty discussed ways of challenging majors at an earlier stage in their academic career. The department was authorized to create two new courses only open to studio majors; ART 207 *Drawing and*

⁷ (1) Knowledge and understanding of historical & social circumstances, critical theories & methodologies, (2) Selection of examples, level of detail, range of supporting evidence, factual accuracy; proper and effective use of art historical terminology, (3) Presentation and organization, coherent and relevant introduction and conclusion, (4) Proper and effective use of English

Composition for Artist I and ART 208 *Drawing and Composition for Artist II*. Both courses implemented in fall 2013 created a more rigorous schedules and grading structure for the students to earlier promote intense study and attention to detail within the major.

At the end of this five year period the department has been fortunate to have gained a new state-of-the-art digital arts lab (through the generous support of an alumna, outside donor, and the Dean of Art & Sciences) and Provost approved faculty hire. We hope that these additions to our department will make demonstrable improvements in the quality and quantity of students interested in digital art which we can report on in the next five year's report.