

Marshall University
Department of Art and Design
Master of Arts in Art Graduate Program Assessment Report
Submitted February 2011

I. Program's Mission: Master of Arts Degree in Art

The Department of Art and Design offers a Master of Arts in Art degree and provides support for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree conferred by the College of Education. Applicants to the MA in Art program may choose to concentrate in one of several studio art areas (ceramics, graphic design, fibers, painting, photography, printmaking, and sculpture) designed to better prepare them for terminal degree programs and/or careers in visual art and design. The studio art track also serves art educators seeking new knowledge and skills or additional university credits for licensing and career advancement. The MA in Art is not a terminal degree and we do not certify teachers.

Accordingly, the goals for the MA program in art and design are to:

- Broaden the context and criteria by which students appraise their work in the world
- Foster rigorous and supportive learning conditions that inspire lucid visual, verbal, and written expressions by students
- Help students develop competitive dossiers suitable for entry into highly regarded terminal degree granting institutions and/or careers in art and design

The MA in Art supports the institution's mission by:

- Providing artistic and cultural programs that further the intellectual, artistic, and cultural life of the individual, community, and region
- Facilitating learning through the preservation, discovery, synthesis, and dissemination of knowledge
- Enlisting graduate faculty who engage and mentor students in scholarly and creative endeavors
- Fostering a climate that appreciates and cultivates diversity
- Challenging students to apply their knowledge, creativity, and skill to ask lofty questions and solve everyday problems
- Educating students to be adaptive thinkers and producers that contribute to society

II. Program's Student Learning Outcomes

Students who complete the MA in Art will be able to:

- A. Use advanced design principles to produce original art and design works using traditional and non-traditional media
- B. Write a reflective composition using advanced art and design vocabulary that convey one's creative intentions and establish a historical context for one's work

- C. Organize a professional-quality art exhibit supported by a coherent written statement
- D. Assemble a high-quality digital dossier suitable for advanced study or careers in the visual arts

III. Assessment Activities:

The 2009-10 review examines *Student Learning Outcome A*, using the following assessment measures:

Assessment Measures (Tools)

- *Assessment Measure 1: The 9-Hour Review* – This measure features a critique conducted by full-time art and design faculty with input from graduate students in attendance. Conducted at the end of the first full-time semester or after the completion of the first nine (9) hours of coursework in the department, the aim of the review is to convey the strengths and weaknesses evident in their creative output. Review results are used to develop a plan of study and guide the direction of future creative activity.
- *Assessment Measure 2: The 18-Hour Review* – This measure also utilizes the critique format and is conducted by full-time faculty at the end of the second semester or after the student has completed 18 hours of course work. This measure is also designed to point out the strengths and weaknesses evident in the work students present for consideration. However, this review focuses on their development from the previous (9-hour) review and the students' level of preparedness for advanced study and the graduate exhibition.

The 9-Hour Review:

Students are expected to present creative work samples using traditional or non-traditional art and design materials, show evidence of experimentation and discuss their background experiences, influences, works in progress, and goals for their plan of study. They submit artwork to the faculty for review in two ways:

1. Display creative work in their studio work space or alternate designated space, and
2. Deliver an oral presentation about their ideas, influences, and work

Students ability to meet the standard is measured using a numeric scale that corresponds to the system of letter grades used in higher education: 4 = excellent (A), 3 = good (B), 2 = satisfactory (C), 1 = poor (D) and 0 = fail (F). Faculty use review forms to rate student performance in the following categories: a) oral presentation, b) concepts presented, c) execution of concept, d) craftsmanship appropriate to type of artwork, e) arrangement/appearance of work, and f) originality. The forms also leave space for narrative comments but those are used to help qualify the marks and place emphasis on key points. The graduate coordinator tabulates the summary scores and transcribes/translates narrative comments and shares them with students during individual conferences. Summary documentation from reviews and individual meetings is placed in the student's departmental file and shared with their advisors.

Benchmarks:

While there are agreed-upon criteria for determining merit in the visual arts (e.g., adept technical skill, new material use, compositional strength, stylistic innovation, historical importance, etc.) the standards for determining aesthetic and economic value in the visual arts are also very subjective. Accordingly, arts organizations affiliated with higher education like Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE), The

College Art Association (CAA), and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), have not established commonly agreed-upon benchmarks for student performance. Not unexpectedly, the department has not established a uniform benchmark for the 9-hour review. Nevertheless, we are developing a standard that would require students to average 2.5 points (or better) out of a possible 4 points, across six rubric areas in order to earn passing marks. While this has been our intent, the department has not consistently adhered to this as an advancement requirement.

Results/Analysis:

During AY 2009-10 four students participated in the 9-Hour Review. The average total score for this review period was 2.71 (with 4 points as the highest possible score), is higher than the four-year mean (based on aggregate total scores from 2005-09) which averaged 2.5 out of 4 points. While this looks like a slight improvement; the scores alone without a broader context and sampling are a bit misleading. For example, this year one student scored considerably higher on the 9-hour review (3.42) than did the others, which raised the average score for the group appreciably.

So, for AY 2009-10 we acted on a data collection/analysis suggestion in the Office of Assessment's summary report from last year. During the current review we considered the mean score on each trait of the rubric in an attempt to determine whether students show a relative strength in one or the other area, which might suggest the area/s that need strengthening in our curriculum. The mean scores on the 9-hour review by rubric category: **oral presentation** (2.71), **concepts presented** (2.78), **execution of concept** (2.61), **craftsmanship appropriate to type of artwork** (2.74), **arrangement/appearance of work** (2.88), and **originality** (2.53), reveal slightly lower scores in concepts and originality. This is not an unusual pattern for first semester graduate students taking the 9-hour review for the first time because students often enter our graduate program with suitable technical training. However, because entering a self-directed graduate environment (especially at a new institution in an unfamiliar city) is quite different than the predominantly assignment based conditions that define an undergraduate learning environment, students are often unsettled and rethink previously held assumptions that lead their ideas, interests, and work in new directions.

Analysis/Planned Action:

Presently, rubrics and desired student outcomes in the Department of Art & Design reflect the collective knowledge of the faculty and awareness of current professional practices and publications. While far from conclusive, because 9-hour review scores may also reveal as much about how faculty assess work and assign values (e.g., personal preference, grade inflation, etc.) as it does the actual work being reviewed, more thought needs to go into developing an internal standard. Therefore, in the absence of universally accepted external standards, we will thoroughly examine the way the 9-hour review is organized, taught, and evaluated to address the following shortcomings and help us set internal benchmarks for student performance. Areas of immediate concern include:

- Inconsistent or “hands-off” graduate advising and instruction
- Grade inflation, aggravated by numerical assessments that conflicted with narrative comments
- Expectations that are not realistic or clearly delineated to students
- Not having clearly defined or evenly applied rubrics when evaluating student performance

We recognize that reviews conducted on a representative sampling of students should, when benchmarked, measured and assessed over time, reveal useful insights into overall student preparedness and identify programmatic strengths and specific areas where adjustments may be warranted. Consequently, the department will revise the criteria and rubrics used for evaluating the 9-hour review. To better quantify and convey new objectives and expectations to students, faculty, and the university assessment team, the department will devote a section to assessment in the revised departmental graduate student handbook we plan to distribute to new and returning students and faculty.

The 18-Hour Review:

The 18-hour review measures student productivity/performance, ability to work in a self-directed environment and the amount of development demonstrated in their work since the 9-hour review. Students are expected to show media competence, works in progress, and finished original works that depict clear, thoughtfully, executed concepts. The goal of this review is to measure their level of preparedness for self-directed work that culminates in the graduate exhibition.

Using a critique-based format similar to the previous (9-hour) review, students participating in the 18-hour review present artwork to the faculty for review in two ways:

- a) Display creative work in their studio area or a designated workspace, and
- b) Deliver an oral presentation about their ideas, influences, and work

Students are expected to demonstrate improvement in the areas of original exploration of concept and overall competence with media and methods. Using the following criteria as discussion points and evaluation categories and the familiar 4 (high) and 0 (low) scoring scale, the faculty rate student performance and production during the review by assigning numeric values and narrative comments to what they see/hear. The graduate coordinator translates the summary scores and narrative comments from the critiques and shares them with students during individual conferences. Copies of formal summative letters are sent to students and a copy is also placed in their student file.

Benchmarks:

While there are agreed upon criteria for determining merit in the visual arts (e.g., adept technical skill, new material use, compositional strength, stylistic innovation, historical importance, etc.) the standards for determining aesthetic and economic value in the visual arts are also very subjective. Accordingly, arts organizations affiliated with higher education like Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE), The College Art Association (CAA), and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), have not established commonly agreed upon benchmarks for student performance. Consequently, much like the 9-hour review, the subjective aspects of art and design production, appreciation, and valuation, do not lend themselves readily to measurement or standardization.

Not unsurprisingly, in the absence of commonly accepted benchmarks for student performance in a production-based studio art model, the department has been unable to set a benchmark for the 18-hour review (that consistently measured the strengths and shortcomings in the work shown and the student's overall level of readiness for self-directed work that culminates in the graduate art exhibition).

However, that does not imply the department has not tried. Several years ago it was agreed upon and stated that in order to pass the 18-hour review, students must earn a minimum of 2.75 points (or better) out of a possible 4 points in each of the previously listed six rubric assessment areas. As it turns out this was a reasonable projected benchmark because the mean annual aggregate score from 2005-09 on the 18-hour review was 2.9 (on a four point scale). However, even with narrative faculty feedback to reinforce numerical scores the standard was not uniformly adhered to.

Results/Analysis:

During AY 2009-10 five students participated in the 18-Hour Review (four for the first time and one was enrolled for a repeat attempt). The average total score for this review period was 3.33 points (out of 4). On the surface this score, is higher than the aforementioned four-year average. However, this years results may be misleading because two students scored 3.6 or better on the 18-hour review and one student scored considerably lower (2.73) than the others, which lowered the average for the group.

As we mentioned earlier in the 9-hour review, for AY 2009-10 we acted on a data collection/analysis suggestion in the Office of Assessment's summary report from last year. This year we considered the mean score on each trait of the rubric in an attempt to determine whether students show a relative strength in one or the other area, which might suggest the area/s that need strengthening in our curriculum. Overall the mean scores for AY 2009-10 on the 18-hour review by rubric category: **oral presentation** (3.15), **concepts presented** (3.10), **execution of concept** (3.18), **craftsmanship appropriate to type of artwork** (3.50), **arrangement/display of work** (3.24), and **originality** (3.02), were higher than in years past.

However, like we saw in the 9-hour review, the average scores on the 18-hour review reveal slightly higher scores in the craftsmanship and arrangement/display categories than in the other areas. Again, this is not unusual for graduate students at the 18-hour review stage because they still tend to (over) rely on techniques, but for all of the reasons outlined previously in the 9-hour review, and need more time to develop their concepts and confidence.

Analysis/Planned Action:

Presently, rubrics and desired student outcomes reflect the collective knowledge of the faculty and awareness of current professional standards. While far from conclusive, as the data may also reveal as much about the forms used and how faculty assess work (e.g., personal preference, grade inflation, etc.), as it does the actual work they are reviewing, the department needs to collect more data, and look at scores and learning outcomes in more detail in order to establish a meaningful benchmark for the 18-hour reviews.

However, we recognize that reviews conducted on a representative sampling of students should, when benchmarked, measured and assessed over time, reveal useful insights into overall student preparedness and identify programmatic strengths and specific areas where adjustments may be warranted. Therefore, as part of our ongoing self-assessment process and in order to better quantify and convey objectives and outcomes to students and the graduate advisor and university assessment team, the department will revise the uniform criteria and rubrics used for evaluating students taking the 18-hour review. Therefore, in order to establish meaningful benchmarks for the 18-hour review the department must decide on the minimum scores required to pass and revise evaluation forms to reflect the new rubrics and criteria, so everyone can differentiate between expectations at this stage and those in first (9-hour) review.

III. Overview of changes implemented in your program this past year based on results and planned action specified in last year's report.

One of the primary things we noticed was that applications to our graduate program were often delayed/derailed by the minimum GRE score required. This prevented some prospective students who displayed skills and aptitude from having their applications considered or accepted. Secondly, although it had been intermittently hinted at in previous years, it became apparent last year that our graduate population lacked sufficient urgency, drive for distinction, or sense of identity/community. In part, we attributed this malaise to:

- inconsistent or "hands-off" graduate advising and instruction
- grade inflation aggravated by numerical assessments that conflicted with narrative comments
- expectations that are not realistic or clearly delineated to students
- not having clearly defined or evenly applied rubrics when evaluating student performance

Based on an analysis of departmental assessment data, the faculty determined the following changes would increase our ability to attract and retain graduate students with superior portfolios and potential:

- eliminating the required minimum GRE score
- making revisions to the departmental graduate handbook
- reviewing/revising the graduate program coordinators responsibilities
- requiring all graduate students and faculty to attend midterm and 9hr/18hr reviews
- adding private graduate research studios to our departmental space priorities

In addition to the actions above, the department remains engaged in discussions about proposing a new degree: the Master of Fine Art (MFA), which is the terminal degree in the visual arts. While we are still collecting data, based on a gap in the regional market and degree offerings at peer schools and comparable sister-institutions with MFA programs, we believe we will recruit an even better caliber of student and brand these graduates with the terminal degree from Marshall (which sets into motion a positive cycle of recurring mutually beneficial benefits).

IV. Specify any changes/modifications made to your program based specifically on data obtained during Assessment Day Activities.

Assessment Day activities in the department have been focused on the undergraduate program.

V. Assistance Needed with Assessment:

We would welcome having an external assessment expert come to campus to help us refine program goals, improve our data collection, and analysis and set benchmarks for student achievement.

Submitted by _____
Byron D. Clercx, Chair

Date: _____
Department of Art and Design