Art and Music Department 2010-2012 Assessment Review
Departmental Goal 6: Professional Preparedness

Overview

In the 2010/11 Academic Year, the Art and Music Department’s Assessment Committee began assessing its Departmental Learning Goals Report. Because of faculty time constraints and the complicated scope of the report, the Committee determined that reviewing all of the goals over a period of a year would not allow for a meaningful, thorough examination. Therefore, the Committee elected to focus upon a single goal. We first discussed the goals generally and then prioritized the individual goals based upon importance to our newest curricular initiatives. In particular, we regarded our recently created capstone courses “ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar” and “ARTS 488 Graphic Design / Illustration Senior Portfolio” as our two most important curricular changes, and therefore rated Learning Goals that most directly related to those two courses with highest immediate importance. With these directives in mind, the Committee deliberated and selected “Goal 6: Professional Preparedness” for yearlong assessment.

After implementing changes and observing results, the Assessment Committee determined that it would be beneficial to spend an additional year reviewing this critical program goal. Therefore, we spent the 2011/12 focusing again on “Goal 6: Professional Preparedness.” In this second year of review, we had the opportunity to see the effects of our curricular and procedural changes. This allowed us to determine the relative success of our initiatives.

Objective

To review, assess, and implement suggested changes to “Goal 6: Professional Preparedness” (from the Art and Music Department’s “Departmental Learning Goals” report).

Goal 6 and Its Learning Outcomes

Goal 6: To demonstrate professional expertise and vision in one or more studio art areas through the presentation of a culminating exhibition and comprehensive portfolio.

Learning Outcomes:
1. Acquire pragmatic knowledge and technical skills at the level of professionalism required in the field.
2. Demonstrate an ability to state analytical and methodical written and verbal descriptions of subjects.
3. Demonstrate evidence of effort, growth, motivation, and confidence in the thesis project and portfolio.

2010/11 Process

The Department Assessment team reviewed the syllabi for the capstone courses “ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar” and “ARTS 488 Graphic Design/Illustration Senior Portfolio.” Additionally, we reviewed the curriculum leading up to these courses, focusing especially on the mid- to upper-level studio courses. Our goal was to create systematic methods for quantifiable
assessment of the student work produced in the two classes as it related to the Department’s Studio Art “Goal 6: Professional Preparedness.”
In both classes, students are expected to create bodies of work that are uniquely creative and exemplify mature understanding of their discipline. The work during the semester leads to a culminating exhibition in the University’s Mazmanian Gallery.
After reviewing the materials, the Assessment Team, in consultation with the entire Department, suggested actions in three areas:

1. General Curriculum

   - Restructure the Painting Concentration, including the addition of new intermediate course offerings to encourage a richer exploration of the painting discipline.
   - Switch the Graphic Design studio room (MA 406) with the Drawing studio room (MA 403). This facility change would create a more open, centralized space for Drawing students (beginning through advanced) in the square, sky-lit MA 406. The L-shaped MA 403 would allow for a dual-purpose space, where Graphic Design students could work on Apple computers in one area, and have a flat table group work station for hands-on work, critique, and slide or video presentations.
   - Research NASAD (National Association of Schools of Art and Design) accreditation to elevate the national perception of our program.
   - Introduce large-scale “real world” projects into the course ARTS 431 Advanced Graphic Design. This would enable the professor to better teach students professional accountability; competitive presentation techniques with actual clients in mind; and, above all, meaningful, visually striking design.

2. ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar

   - Add a faculty review panel to the preparatory work leading up to the Senior Thesis Exhibition show. The senior Studio Art students would present their work in a slide show, detailing art historical and cultural influences, thematic and conceptual concerns, technical approaches, and visual intentions. This would allow faculty to review, critique, and make suggestions to the students prior to the exhibition. It would also allow the faculty to determine if the student is ready for the exhibition or not. Faculty would complete an evaluation form with a checklist of key factors and room for comments and suggestions.

3. ARTS 488 Graphic Design/Illustration Senior Portfolio

   - Institute a review panel for graduating portfolio students following their senior exhibition.
   - Assign mapping and writing exercises at the beginning of the class to help students see the connections throughout their collection of work. Insights from this exercise would eventually inform their artist statements.
   - Foster more student participation in the design and conceptualization of their group thesis exhibition.
2010/11 Review

The actions suggested above were implemented over the course of the 2010/11 school year. In reviewing the work completed in the two capstone courses, the two Mazmanian Gallery exhibitions, and the evaluation process itself, the Assessment Team presented the following findings:

1. ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar

Strengths

- Students concentrating in specific studio art disciplines (Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Ceramics) generally scored very well on the evaluation forms that were administered at their faculty review panels.
- Students concentrating in specific studio art disciplines (Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Ceramics) generally produced Thesis Exhibitions that evidenced rich, cohesive approaches to conceptual concerns, and also showed competent technical skills.
- Curricular changes made in the Painting Concentration seemed to be yielding benefits as evidenced by stronger thematic depth and more expressive, more competently painted figurative work.
- Students were able to digest the critique and commentary given to them by the faculty during the Faculty Review Panel and apply these suggestions to their Senior Thesis exhibitions.

Weaknesses

- The Faculty Review Panel occurred in the Fall Semester during the capstone Senior Art Studio Seminar. The actual Senior Thesis Exhibitions were not finalized and displayed until late in the following Spring semester. There was no official review in the Spring when the artwork was complete, so the students were not given concrete evaluations of their finalized bodies of work. Additionally the Assessment team had to rely on a more anecdotal approach to review.
- The actual course ARTS 479 Senior Art Studio Seminar is a Fall course worth 4 credits. The Senior Thesis Exhibitions occur in the Spring and are not credit bearing. We believe that some students, realizing that the Exhibitions were not actually required for graduation, did not take the shows seriously enough and did not put in the requisite amount of work during the winter break and into the Spring semester to develop a well-conceived, well-crafted, cohesive exhibition.
- In contrast to those students who concentrated in specific studio art disciplines, students in the Art General Concentration were weaker in their oral presentations and in the work they presented for their Senior Thesis Exhibitions.

2. ARTS 488 Graphic Design/Illustration Senior Portfolio

Strengths

- Combination review teams of faculty and outside professionals gave students strong direction and critical commentary of their final portfolios.
• Student work evidenced skillful handling of materials and good conceptual exploration and realization.
• Students in the Advanced Graphic Design class worked on a group project, designing the catalog the Bookbuilders of Boston’s Book Awards. This fueled their portfolios for the Senior Portfolio class, providing them with printed examples from an actual design job. With each student teaming with others on different aspects of the catalog design, they were able to exhibit, in their portfolios, their ability to collaborate and work through an established design strategy.
• Students’ artists’ statements reflected sound visual directions and organized integration of diverse personal interests.
• The Senior Show, centered on the theme of “Home,” included numerous designs and illustrations of high quality. The student energy and cooperation involved in transforming the gallery into a series of display “rooms” with false walls created a compelling atmosphere.

Weaknesses

• While the Bookbuilders of Boston’s catalog project was very successful, more examples of “real world” work in design and illustration should be cultivated as students generate their portfolios.
• The Senior Show, though dynamic, did not adequately highlight the works of individual students. Works of various students were interspersed in a confusing manner. With design professionals attending the opening reception, a more cohesive showing of each students’ body of work would allow those working in the field to get a clearer sense of the students’ strengths.
• Students’ use of software programs in their designs and illustrations varied greatly in proficiency and confident experimentation.
• In the final Senior Portfolio Reviews, there were two review teams. Each team only saw half of the students. If possible it would be better for both teams to review the entire class’s work to maximize the critical input for the students.

3. General

Additionally, the Assessment Team followed through on its research of the NASAD Accreditation. We determined that we could enlist an outside reviewer to administer a consultative visit during the 2011/12 academic year. This reviewer could act as the point person for our 5-year Program Review, while simultaneously giving us valuable input into a 2012/13 application for official NASAD accreditation. This accreditation would give us national recognition as a Studio Art program that operates under NASAD standards for quality art education.

2011/12 Process

The Department Assessment team reviewed the findings from the 2010/11 Assessment Review of Department Goal 6: Professional Preparedness. In particular, the team focused on the perceived weaknesses of the studio capstone courses. The team deliberated over curricular structure, classroom teaching strategies, and the external perception of our program, in considering ways to improve our graduates’ professional preparedness in entering the market.
After again reviewing our program and our materials, the Assessment Team, in consultation with the entire Department, suggested actions in three areas:

1. General Curriculum

- Request a consultative visit from a NASAD-approved reviewer who would serve as our Program Reviewer for our 5-year Department Review, and who would additionally give us preparatory insight into an official NASAD Accreditation Review the following year. Being a NASAD-accredited institution would give our program greater national status and therefore would benefit our graduates.
- Eliminate the Art General Concentration from our program. Ongoing observations of the Senior Thesis exhibitions led our Department to realize that the students concentrating in Art General were less prepared for their shows. Students who had, instead, concentrated in specific disciplines (Painting, Sculpture, Printmaking, Ceramics), had the opportunity to immerse themselves fully in an area, and were better able to conceive of and execute more professional, thought provoking exhibitions. Eliminating the Art General Concentration would necessitate that students actively decide upon an area of study and immerse themselves in a discipline-based path toward advanced creative exploration.
- In Advanced Graphic Design, develop collaborations with notable non-profit organizations. Projects designed for such institutions would bolster the professionalism of students’ exiting portfolios and provide networking connections for senior students.
- In Graphic Design I, assign weekly student instructional presentations to encourage students to teach one another complex aspects of design software.
- Develop better resources and clearer directives for the required internships in the Graphic Design and Illustration Concentrations. In this way we would foster opportunities for professional networking and the development of more “real world” projects to be included in the students’ exiting portfolios.

2. ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar

- Institute Faculty Review Panels for senior students in the Spring semester prior to their Thesis Exhibitions (this would be in addition to the Fall Semester Review Panel). Include public presentations of their projects to the University community. This would allow students to get final input on their completed (or near complete) bodies of work. It would give the Department the opportunity to make culminating assessments of the students’ development through the Art Program.

3. ARTS 488 Graphic Design/Illustration Senior Portfolio

- Give students more responsibility in conceptualizing the theme and structure of their group thesis exhibition, while also ensuring that they organize the show in such a way that it highlights the vision of each individual designer and illustrator clearly.

2011/12 Review

The actions suggested above were implemented over the course of the 2010/11 school year. In reviewing the work completed in the two capstone courses, the two Mazmanian Gallery
exhibitions, and the evaluation process itself, the Assessment Team presented the following findings:

1. General Curriculum

Strengths

- The 5-year Department Review/NASAD Consultative Visit by external reviewer Professor Deborah Dluhy indicated that Studio Art Majors were producing quality work that showed good understanding of drawing and design principles and skill-based approaches to creating art.
- Working with the University’s Curriculum Committee, the Art and Music Department successfully changed the Studio Art Program, removing the Art General Concentration and requiring students to declare a specific art discipline for their Concentration. This change will be incrementally instituted as students working from the requirements of older University Catalogs graduate and incoming students adapt the new requirements. We believe that these changes will yield greater conceptual depth and technical proficiency in our graduates.

Weaknesses

- The 5-year Department Review/Consultative Visit by Professor Deborah Dluhy indicated that the Studio Art facilities were inadequate to produce professional quality work. In particular the Printmaking, Sculpture, and Ceramics areas presented health and safety concerns, in addition to lacking in NASAD standards for quality work spaces. These areas might present a problem in garnering NASAD accreditation.
- Deborah Dluhy also commented on the fact that a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree is the standard for art students seeking careers in the Fine Arts. With our program offering only a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art, we put our students at a disadvantage.

2. ARTS 487 Senior Art Studio Seminar

Strengths

- A second Faculty Review Panel with student presentations to the public in the Spring Semester benefitted the students by giving them informative suggestions as they prepared for the conceptualization and installation of their Senior Thesis Exhibitions.
- Students wrote artists statements for their exhibition that demonstrated an ability to relate good analytical and methodical written descriptions of their artwork.
- Students in the exhibition produced work that exhibited confident understanding of their artistic discipline and reflected unique personal visions.

Weaknesses

- While the institution of a second Faculty Review Panel was immediately beneficial to the students and the faculty, we did not have in place a good method for more officially documenting the artwork produced and presented by the students, nor the evaluative
comments by the faculty. For the purposes of ongoing assessment, this is problematic and should be addressed moving forward.

- The Panel Reviews only reflect upon the work completed in a student’s senior year. It would be more informative to accumulate evaluation materials (images of artwork, critical reviews) over the course of a student’s four-year tenure at the University in order to better assess ongoing progress.
- Unlike the Graphic Design and Illustration Senior Portfolio class, the Senior Art Studio Seminar class had only Faculty reviewers for the students, with no input from studio art professionals outside the University community.

3. ARTS 488 Graphic Design/Illustration Senior Portfolio

**Strengths**

- Professor Stephanie Grey created a blog with clear instructions for finding and registering for internships. It also included listings for numerous internships available for Design and Illustration students in the Boston/MetroWest area. We immediately saw results with several students procuring internships with prestigious organizations such as FableVision, The American Cancer Society, and Candlewick Press publishers.
- Senior portfolios included more examples of “real world” design projects, including the development of logos for the conference “Bridging the Gap in Tough Times: Victimization and Safety,” and the development of environmental design for the Downtown Framingham Revitalization Project’s Farm Pond initiative.
- Student work exhibited a broader range and more inventive manipulation of various design software programs.
- Students in the Senior Portfolio class worked diligently to develop a cohesive theme based on storytelling for the Senior Show (entitled “The Long and Short of It”). Though the theme encompassed the entire group of exhibitors, the students managed to organize the show in such a way that each individual student’s work was highlighted clearly and reflected their unique strengths and visions. Work in the show was diverse. The student work in Graphic Design and Illustration was well executed, creative, and professionally presented.
- Students confidently presented work in a variety of formats including graphic novels, photographic books, experimental book forms, web sites, large-scale vinyl print outs, catalogs, brochures, and posters.

**Weaknesses**

- We did not have in place a good method for more officially documenting the artwork produced and presented by the students, nor the evaluative comments by the faculty and external reviewers. For the purposes of ongoing assessment, this is problematic and should be addressed moving forward.
- The Panel Reviews only reflect upon the work completed in a student’s senior year. It would be more informative to accumulate evaluation materials (images of artwork, critical reviews) over the course of a student’s four-year tenure at the University in order to better assess ongoing progress.

**Future Plans**
The Art and Music Department’s Assessment Team has recommended the following actions for the upcoming 2012/13 Academic Year:

- Seek official NASAD (National Association of Schools of Art and Design) Accreditation.
- Continue to address the facility issues of workplace efficiency, health, and safety in our current art studio spaces.
- Develop a BFA program.
- Investigate the possibility of making the Studio Art Senior Thesis Exhibitions credit-bearing requirements for graduation.
- Investigate methods of formulaically documenting the students’ capstone course artistic output as well as faculty and external reviewers’ evaluations.
- Investigate methods for more effectively tracking students’ artistic progress over four years (perhaps utilizing programs such as LiveText or EPortfolios).
- For the Senior Art Studio Seminar course, develop initiatives that would allow seniors in the class to work with and receive input from professional artists.

Moving forward with our intentions to cycle through the assessment of our Departmental Goals, the Assessment Team in consultation with the rest of the Art and Music Department has determined that we will assess Departmental Goal 5: Art Historical Knowledge over the course of the 2012/13 Academic Year. The Goal is detailed below:

**Goal 5 and Its Learning Outcomes**

Goal 5: To demonstrate knowledge of major art periods, art movements, multicultural art traditions, and individual artists from antiquity to the present.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Recognize and identify major art and architectural monuments from antiquity to the present.
2. Identify the characteristic features of major artistic and cultural styles and demonstrate the ability to categorize known and unknown objects by style.
3. Visually recognize, identify and explain major iconographical themes from antiquity to the present.