

Cornell College
Departmental / Program Assessment Project
Year Three Progress Report

Department / Program:	Department of Art and Art History
Person Submitting this Form:	Tony Plaut, professor
Date:	August 23, 2012

Brief Overview of the Assessment Project: (refer to original Assessment Project Outline)

- Outcomes you assessed.
- Questions your project attempted to answer.
- Methods used to gather and analyze evidence.

5 -- "All senior majors will engage in a conversation (oral defense) with Department of Art and Art History faculty to explicate and defend their own creative choices or research projects."

What are our departmental objectives for the oral defense session?

For instance, is this to be primarily a testing session or a teaching session, why?

A) If it is a test:

What content is to be covered by the test?

What prompts might elicit this content? Questions? Tasks?

What is the appropriate format for this test? Oral? Written?

Are majors adequately prepared to engage this material?

How do we evaluate (grade) this test with consistency?

How and what feedback do we provide to the students?

B) If it is a teaching session:

What content is to be taught in the session?

How do we present this?

Is this content consistent with prior teaching/learning?

Is this a non-graded experience?

We reviewed our notes from recent defense sessions and compared student performances with their previous performances in the department.

Involvement:

- *Who has been involved in this project?*
- *How well informed and involved are members of the department/office?*

Our oral defense sessions include full participation of the tenure track members of the department (four) and our significant part-time staff (usually one or two).

All of us are fully informed and participate in the session and the subsequent grading process. The grading session is a democratic process in which all participating faculty submit grades for each student. These are then averaged and discussed until a consensus for each grade is reached.

Results:

Please outline in detail what you learned through your data analysis / interpretation.

We learned that oral defense format was functioning primarily as a test for the students; a test that asked them to respond extemporaneously to some rather profound questions about their identity and intentions as an artist.

This format was easy for some students: those with the "gift of gab" who could remain relaxed and conversational and make a coherent presentation in response to the verbal questions. On the other hand, there were some very smart and capable students for whom the session was terrifying and thus they would suddenly become shy or blurt out contradictory or shallow claims.

We learned that the testing role is important but the impromptu structure was not conducive to the deep and honest self-reflection that we hope to inspire.

Decisions:

Please detail the decisions made as a result of the interpretations / conclusions drawn from the assessment project.

Although the function as a test is appropriate and will be maintained, we also decided to use the "lead up" to the oral defense as a more focused and extended teaching opportunity.

We decided that we were missing an opportunity for our students to more deeply engage ideas of the function of art and the role of the artist in society.

The oral defense session will continue to function as test but with our new format, we hope that as students prepare for the test, they will be engaged in serious academic work and self-reflection.

Documentation:

Please explain how your assessment work is being documented. Please be sure to address where the raw data is stored, what reports (including meeting minutes) exist, and where all relevant documents are located.

There is no raw data.

The documentation will consist of a new set of teaching materials that will be distributed to the senior Studio Art majors beginning in the 2012-13 academic year.

Year Four – Implementation of Change:

The goal of the fourth year of the assessment cycle is to implement decisions made as a result of the interpretations/conclusions drawn from the assessment project. What are your plans for the coming year? Please be sure to address:

- Plans for sharing results and decisions as well as for celebrating noteworthy results.
- Plans for implementing change(s).
- Plans for evaluating implementation progress and impact of the changes.

Beginning this fall, we will present our students with a document that outlines the expectations for the oral defense session (which will still occur in the spring). The document will include a list of questions, some of which may appear in the actual oral defense, but all which will be of the type that *could* occur in the oral defense session. We want them to ponder the issues and “try them on” during their senior year.

This will eliminate some of the anxiety related to the impromptu speaking pressure, and instead allow the students to engage the questions in an extended timeframe. This will hopefully lead to more honest and thoughtful answers.

During our final grading session, we will consider whether or not the student responses at the oral defense session were, as a whole, qualitatively better than in previous years. This will be a subjective judgment that will rely upon our collective memory and notes from previous years' sessions.

Evaluation of the Assessment Project:

Please provide an overview of the quality of the assessment project. What worked well? What changes would you recommend for the future?

The scope of the project was appropriate. It was a good decision to focus on only one portion of the larger senior Studio Art major experience rather than the year long process.

The oral defense component is an important part of our program that has been utilized for quite a few years (40?) Although it has undergone many small modifications in that duration, it needed to be questioned and reconceived in a thorough manner.

Challenges:

What challenges has your department/office encountered to date with your assessment project?

We understand and value this type of assessment. Our department has a long tradition of self-assessment and attendant program modification. Our only challenge has been to find time and energy to complete the relevant paperwork (documentation) of this round project.

Also, we have not had succeeded in our aim to gather information from outside sources. We had hoped to contact other institutions and alumni to get some additional perspectives on our oral defense process.

Additional Information:

Feel free to add additional comments or supporting documents to this report.

This assessment project has been directed toward our Studio Art majors only. A comparable oral defense session occurs for the Art History students. The two have parallel structures but the specific expectations are different and so the assessment of the Art History oral defense is its own separate matter which may or may not be the focus of assessment in the near future.

Upon completion, please submit the report to Becki Elkins, Box 2628.

Anthony Plaut

Your Signature

Anthony Plaut

Department Chair Signature

August 23, 2012

Date

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