

One Question/Answer: Art History Program Assessment

Learning Goal:

To develop skills in visual analysis, criticism, research, and writing that enrich life experiences and can lead to a variety of rewarding professional careers.

Assessment Strategy:

Evaluate student performance in major courses, all of which require significant visual analysis, exams, and compare-contrast essays.

Findings:

Four art history majors graduated this year. Their major grades are as follows:

	<u>Student 1</u>	<u>Student 2</u>	<u>Student 3</u>	<u>Student 4</u>
Major Core:				
AAH 105	A-	B-	A	B-
AAH 106	B+	A-	A-	B-
100-level non-western course	A-	B+	B+	C+
Course exploring women artists	A	B	A	D/B
Senior Seminar	A	B+	B	C-
Major Options (300-level or above):				
Ancient or Medieval Art	B	A	B	C+
Renaissance or Baroque Art	A-	B	A-	B-
Modern or American Art	A-	B	B+	B
Additional Art History	A	A	A-	B-
Additional Art History	B+	A	B+	B
Additional Art History Courses (200-level or above):				
Additional Art History	A	A-	A-	A
Additional Art History	B	B	B	C
Additional Art History	n/a	n/a	B	n/a

We compared these grades with the students' performances in other academic courses as well as their overall GPAs. What we found was that overall, the students' academic achievements in their major are consistent with their other learning experiences at TCNJ. We also compared the students' major course grades with the quality of their exit exams. The capstone exam took the form of an essay for which they needed to draw on and synthesize the knowledge they had gained as art history majors. Below is the question they had to answer:

AAH 391-01 Senior Art History Capstone Experience Exit Exam

Question: Some people would argue that appreciating art is innate—anyone can appreciate a great work of art because it transcends cultures and time periods. Others would argue that art often is made within a specific context, and that to fully appreciate a work of art, the viewer needs to be familiar with the cultural context and value relating to the work. Drawing on the art history courses that you have taken, which position do you agree with and why?

Support your answer with two examples of either specific artworks or relevant readings from each of the following five areas (for a total of 10 examples): gender and art; ancient art; Renaissance or Baroque art; 19th or 20th century art; and Asian or Islamic art.

We found that the quality of their essay responses to the question matched their overall performance in the major as indicated by their coursework grades. Specifically, students 1 and 2 displayed strong bases of art historical knowledge as well as analytical and writing skills, student 3 performed less well, but still showed intellectual growth, while student 4's performance was marginal.

Interpretation:

The reviews of the grades and coursework indicated that we are offering our students a wide range of art history courses and that as a department we are grading consistently in a manner reflecting what the students have learned. We also found that we are offering our students learning experiences on par with the rest of TCNJ. The review of the exit exams in comparison with their major grades indicated that if the students take advantage of the opportunities offered by their courses, they will develop skills in visual analysis, criticism, research, and writing. Thus, we feel that we are achieving our stated goal. We also found the exit exam to be a very useful tool for evaluating the students' performances as well as our program.

Action Taken:

Apart from the program changes that we already implemented this year, we find no substantial changes are needed. One addition that would be useful is a sophomore/junior review for the art history majors. This experience would allow us to assess the students' learning experiences earlier on, before their last semester here. It also would allow the students to have more of a sense of an intellectual community and give us a chance to communicate the program's goals to them.