

SCHOOL OF ART ASSESSMENT
B.F.A. in Art

May 2019

This document is intended to be both reflective and forward looking. It illustrates a moment in time, but also acknowledges its own elasticity and changeability. Assessment in the School of Art does not fit into a traditional model, just as some of art's practices and procedures eschew many academic paradigms. A collaborative effort between School of Art faculty and administration, this document was initiated by posing a series of questions, such as *What does it mean to succeed in a studio course, art history course, graphic design course, art teacher education course? How does a student receive a passing grade and how is his/her learning measured? What tools are used to disseminate information, inspire independent thinking, and encourage students to make connections between concepts introduced in their courses? What might improve students' learning experience?*

BFA in Art - Studio Art

BFA students must perform successfully in foundations courses (Art 103, 104, 109, 155, 156) as well as additional required courses specific to the BFA program (BFA seminar and Color Theory, for example.) This performance is measurable by grades of C or better. BFA students start out as BA/BS students; their measurable outcomes include those required of BA/BS students in the studio area.

As early as the second semester of the sophomore year, a student may apply for acceptance into BFA program. In order to apply, students gather support from their area faculty, submit an application (which includes two letters of recommendation), organize their artwork and meet with the BFA committee for a critique/review/interview. This outcome is measured by their acceptance or rejection, and students frequently need to apply more than once to get into the program. Once they are accepted into the program, they are required to choose two faculty mentors and spend the rest of their time toward degree engaging and interacting with these two faculty mentors as well as the School of Art faculty as a whole.

In addition to the expectations of studio art BA/BS students, BFA students must demonstrate the ability to work independently and develop one's own studio agenda rather than relying on course assignments; experiment and explore within a studio discipline; push oneself past comfort in areas such as productivity, scale, and material exploration; focus on a specific range of topics, issues, processes, systems, ideas, or values; and develop a clear voice, philosophy, or value system as a visual thinker. These are measurable by evaluation on the part of faculty mentors.

With support and permission from faculty mentors, a BFA student builds a cohesive body of art work for the BFA exhibition, writes a brief accompanying statement, and delivers a public gallery talk that includes a question and answer period for audience members (including faculty and student peers) where feedback is offered.

BFA in Art - Graphic Design

If a student wants to get a BFA in graphic design, he/she applies to the graphic design BFA sequence with a portfolio of works that is evaluated, accepted, or rejected by the graphic design faculty after the student has successfully completed Graphic Design II.

The graphic design sequence has within it an optional client practice component called Design Streak.

Design Streak is a pre-professional graphic design studio providing creative services to businesses, non-for-profit organizations, and institutions in Central Illinois. Clients such as YWCA, Town of Normal, and various centers on campus, work with graphic design seniors so that the students get hands-on, face-to-face experience working with genuine clients instead of just following assignments in courses. In this context, student work is assessed by a non-faculty member: a member of the Bloomington-Normal Community. This kind of assessment certainly comes with its own challenges, such as whether the client has the traditional skill-set to properly assess the students' work. However, graphic design students who go out into the field as professional graphic designers will face this kind of assessment all the time; the client conducts a kind of critique and assessment by approving the work, asking for modifications, or choosing to work with a different graphic designer.

The new graphic design BFA sequence was approved in 2018 and went into use in Spring 2019. After students pass their portfolio review, they take 12 required courses for the BFA and have a group exit exhibition. They also have the option to participate in Design Streak and/or a client experience (internship).

Indirect Assessment

Faculty discuss student learning informally: in friendly conversation, comparing teaching methods, or even talking about how students they share process information and perform differently in different courses. Less casual discussion might occur in the context of curricular revision or student retention.

In other contexts, such as area meetings and studio discipline meetings/critiques, student perceptions of their learning are gathered by faculty and considered on a micro-level. For example, at the end of each semester, the printmaking faculty meet individually with their graduates and advanced students to recap the semester and look toward the future. This is a good time to ask students about the overall quality of their experience and how assessment enhances it or detracts from it.

Another manner to collect feedback, especially undergraduate feedback, is through student response forms; students are asked to describe the extent of their learning in a course as well as faculty grading. By extension, faculty can also address student perceptions of their learning in annual dossiers.

Gathering and studying student perceptions of their learning necessitates tracking students who have graduated. Again, this is an informal process. Faculty who have established long-lasting relationships with their students are a kind of student tracking device, and faculty who are contacted as references can stay abreast of student goals, activities, and accomplishments. Social media is another informal way to keep in touch with alumni.

In any way the School of Art gathers information about student perceptions of their learning - or about their lives in general – there is currently a focus on student successes rather than those who do not continue to make art, teach, or work in art related fields. There are certainly many ways to gage “success” among School of Art alumni; creative problem-solving skills, work ethic, analytical ability, and professional bravery are strengths in many facets of the working world. Art students learn and possess a plethora of transferable skills and these often go unnoticed if the only recognized goal is

graduating students who continue to work in creative or visual art fields.

The School of Art has worked with Alumni Relations to survey alumni, but with very little response and not in recent years. Generating a tool to survey or track School of Art alums would not be easy, and building a reliable, thorough database of alumni contact information would also be quite difficult. Nevertheless, learning more about alums could benefit the School of Art immeasurably.

Assessment Sustainability

The word “assessment” is not part of the everyday vocabulary of the faculty, staff, or administration of the School of Art. The only area that truly understands its meaning, outside of its dictionary definition, is Art Teacher Education because of assessment’s essential nature in state licensure. School of Art faculty assess. However, assessment is not discussed, tracked, or addressed in ways that may be commonplace in other schools and departments on campus. If this document is to be used, kept up to date, and adopted into School of Art culture, the onus is on the faculty, staff, and administration. The worth of those efforts has yet to be determined.

For better or worse, the School of Art has established itself as an exception to many of the actualities of University culture. One small example is that most faculty shun their academic titles in class; students and faculty address each other using first names. This is perhaps a result of the small studio classes. In the facilities in the Center for Visual Arts, there can be as few as 8 or as many as sixteen in a hands-on, process intensive class such as ceramics or printmaking. Another example is discussed in the section “MFA in Studio Art.” At the end of their three-year program, MFA studio students exhibit their thesis body of art work. The accompanying statement, which can be upwards of 30 pages, is approved by the Graduate School and published by ProQuest along with the written theses and dissertations of other graduate students. However, the faculty make it clear to the students that the art work is their thesis, which they present and discuss during their thesis defense. Furthermore, faculty debate with and relate to their students, and each other, in a way that might not exist in the College of Business or the College of Nursing; the creative nature of artistic practice encourages its participants to be different, to stand out. Some might even call the School of Art abnormal.

This document is the first of its kind in the School of Art, so its continued use and sustainability are largely unexplored. In its writing, it has already been of use; faculty have put into words the hurdles, modes of evaluation, and goals for students and the resulting self-studies are united into one end-product. This exercise, in and of itself, is of use. Further uses are up for debate.

This document can apply to curricular/programmatic research and revision. In studying assessment, part of the exercise is looking at *how* students are encouraged to learn. One might also ask *what* students learn, and what might be missing in their educational experience. Recently, after a faculty-wide conversation, faculty started to require that their students attend artist lectures at University Galleries. The School of Art has an extensive line-up of lectures scheduled every year; visiting artists, faculty, visiting curators, and artists exhibiting in University Galleries share their research with the general public. However, students are often absent at these lectures and miss out on seeing artwork, hearing about the studio practice and ideas of others, and understanding what their faculty do when not in the classroom. Requiring attendance and a written response encourages students to think

beyond their immediate experience, see examples of successful artists, and perhaps even set professional goals.

This document can also be used as a recruitment and informational tool. The faculty have already discussed using excerpts to address and introduce assessment to potential students, especially those who are looking at the MFA Studio program. However, at this time it seems that the most obvious use for this document is to prove to the University that the School of Art does indeed employ assessment in its programs.