15 March Assessment, 2014
Ph.D. Program in Art History

First Exam Assessment

Background:

The PhD Program in Art History had a 10 year External Review at the end of Spring 2013, which threw a number of important considerations into light, notably the high level of dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement among students and faculty. As incoming EO (July 2013), I took the faculty on a retreat in order to reflect on the External Review, the program as a whole and how to take it into the future. One of the outcomes of this retreat was the need to set up an Exams & Curriculum Committee in order to review certain aspects of the program (since I arrived in 2008, such a committee has not existed in the department). The E&C Committee comprises two members of faculty (representing Modern and pre-Modern), a student representative, and the Executive Officer.

The External Review noted that, compared to other programs, the PhD Program in Art History overexamines students and places more requirements upon them (distribution requirements, unrelated minor, and a related minor). At the retreat we discussed the possibility of dropping the Comprehensive Exam, an image identification exam that repeats much of the assessment covered in the First Exam. This proposal was voted on and approved by the Executive Committee in September 2013, as well as by the university.

During Fall 2013, the Exams & Curriculum Committee discussed ways in which we might streamline the unrelated and related minor, a proposal that was voted on and approved by the Executive Committee in November 2013, and which is now awaiting final approval by the university.

In February 2014, the E&C Committee introduced a pilot form of assessment for second year students, to replace the now-defunct Comprehensive Examination with a more constructive review of student progress. This review, provisionally entitled the Second Year Evaluation, solicited faculty feedback on the cohort of 16 students who entered the program in Fall 2012. Twelve students were deemed to be making excellent or good progress. Faculty had ‘some concerns’ about two students, and ‘serious concerns’ about two other students, all of which were addressed through meetings between those students and our Deputy Executive Officers.

While undertaking these changes, the program has also been conducting a review of the First Exam, which is the main component of the present report.
1) **Statement of the learning goals for the assessment that you are reviewing.**

The First Exam is designed to assess the first stage in the achievement of requisite key skills for Art History doctoral students: visual recognition and familiarity with key visual documents in the history of art, including paintings, prints, photographs, sculptures, buildings, and moving images; clear verbal expression, the ability to put observations of the visual into textual form; analysis, specifically the ability to analyze texts written from a variety of positions and authorial points of view; synthetic skills, or the ability to integrate an array of historical and theoretical material. The First Exam is constructed by the Exams and Curriculum Committee and comprises two parts. Firstly, identification and discussion of key images in the field of art history; secondly, essay questions based on previously-assigned readings that cut across the field. For the Modern exam, which the majority of students take, the theme readings are selected from the subfields across the Modern field.

2) **A description of what data or other information you are drawing on to conduct your review (e.g. students’ exam results, students’ job placements).**

The Exams & Curriculum Committee has held monthly meetings to discuss the format, content and evaluation of the First Exam. It was also discussed at meetings with students: a meeting between students and the Executive Committee in September 2013, and a Town Hall meeting in November 2013. In March 2014, the program’s Graduate Reps issued a survey soliciting student feedback about the timing of the First Exam (at the moment it is held at 45 credits, whereas most other programs in the Humanities set the First Exam at the end of the first year). This survey will be discussed at the next Exams and Curriculum meeting on 2 April.

We have also looked at exam results. The goals for the Early Modern and Medieval First Exams are similar to those for the Modern field and the exams are structured similarly. As can be seen from the results, the great majority of students during the period Fall 2011 – Spring 2014 passed the exams in all three fields. With 2 exceptions, those who re-took the exam after failing passed the second time. Results for all three exams are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Passed</th>
<th>Failed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Passed: 16, Failed: 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early Modern</td>
<td>Passed: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Passed: 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Passed: 6, Failed 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Failed: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Passed: 4, Failed 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Passed: 2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Fall 2013
Modern Passed: 12, Failed 2
Early Modern Passed 1

Spring 2014
Modern Passed 7, Failed 1

3) Your findings. Is the assessment (and preparation for it) effective?

The program offers lecture courses that cover a wide range of works of art and architecture and that therefore provide grounding for passing the portions of the exams that are devoted to the identification and analysis of specific works. In addition, each student is required to take a methodology course, one of the principal functions of which is to make students aware of the historic development of the discipline as well as of the major interpretative perspectives they will encounter. All seminar courses also require extensive reading in the major literature of the field and introduce students to a variety of approaches that they will again encounter on the first exam. The program also offers workshops on how to prepare for the First Exam, which are well attended and receive positive student feedback.

Each First Exam is read by two faculty members in the student’s field. In the case of borderline passes/failures, the Executive Officer also reviews the exam. The grading for each section of the exam is quantified. For the image-based portion of the exam, points are awarded for the correct identification of the work, and for accurately placing it in its historical context (associating it with a particular movement, country, and so on). On the essay portion, the faculty grading the exam look for a number of specific points to be made and subtract credit when those are not articulated. In grading the second section, faculty address the following: Did the student analyze the full range of arguments presented by the individual authors they read? Did the student critique the arguments, rather than merely repeating or describing them? The graders also expect that the essays will be framed as arguments made in response to the questions asked in relation to the readings and do not accept responses that are simply lists of points or summaries of the readings.

4) Proposed changes, if any, to the assessment, the learning goals for it, the curriculum/preparation leading up to it.

The current discussion is whether or not to move the exam forward in the curriculum, in order to bring the PhD Program in Art History in line with other programs in the Humanities. The main impediment to moving it forward in the program is the difference between students entering with a BA and those entering with an MA. This affects not only the amount of preparation needed for the course, but the fulfillment of language requirements. At the moment, students who enter the program with a BA need to complete one language requirement by 15 credits, and the second before the completion of 30 credits. Those entering with an MA must satisfy all languages requirements before the completion of 45 credits.
5) The next steps that will be taken. (There should be a follow-up on these in the report for the next cycle.)

We will continue to rethink the timing of the First Exam and the possibility of streamlining the language requirements by comparing our approach to that of other departments (e.g. History, Theatre, etc.)

Claire Bishop
Executive Officer
PhD Program in Art History
3.15.14