1. **Learning goals**

The dissertation demonstrates that students have achieved the Program’s final goal: “to formulate a major project of research and interpretation in the field of art history.”

Graduates will demonstrate the ability to conduct original research in their fields of specialization in both archival and published sources and for specialists in contemporary art, through personal interviews. In addition, they will be able to apply their knowledge of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches to shape their research into scholarship.

2. **Data**

Our data collection was multi-pronged:

a) **Surveys:** We decided to send surveys to both recent alumni (last two years, about 30 dissertations completed) and current Level III students (there are about 90 all told). We received 9 responses from recent graduates and 16 from Level III students, approximately a 20% response rate. The surveys, which were tabulated anonymously, asked about what factors helped in the completion of the dissertation, what factors hindered completion, and what changes could improve the process.

b) **Completed dissertations and dissertation proposals.** The Doctoral Faculty Committee also reviewed, in its September meeting, all of the dissertations completed over the last two years (2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years) and also the dissertation proposals passed over the same time frame.

3. **Findings**

The survey results suggested a number of areas in need of improvement:

a) **Dissertation proposal process:**
• Streamline the process of refining a proposal so that the progress from Independent Study to Orals Focus Area to Dissertation Proposal is clearer and better guided.
• Provide better guidelines on what makes a good Dissertation Proposal and provide model examples.
• Require a meeting of student and adviser after the proposal passes to discuss a schedule for completion, research travel if necessary, and applications for external fellowships.

b) Communication:
• Guide students better through the process of choosing an adviser. Perhaps ask professors to provide a short statement regarding their personal philosophy on guiding dissertations to help students decide with whom to work.
  • Formulate and disseminate code of ‘best practices’ for working with an adviser.
  • Clarify the role of the second reader.
  • Clarify expectations for the final dissertation.

c) Writing process
• Sponsor workshops and/or writing groups every term that include deadlines, feedback, the exchange of manuscripts, and oral presentations. Meetings with recent alumni would also help students understand how to finish.

d) Funding
• Provide more funding for research travel grants, tuition for those students who win external fellowships, and internal ‘finishing’ fellowships.
• Identify one adviser per term who will oversee students applying for external fellowships and jobs, including letting students know what is available, reminders about deadlines, help with writing applications, and advice on interviews.

The review of dissertations completed and begun was also informative. It suggested that time to degree could be improved (the average was over 8 years) and reinforced the conclusion that the current attrition rate (around 40% per cohort over the course of the degree) could be very damaging to the program given the recent cutbacks in number of students admitted.

4. Proposed changes.
The data collected was revealing and suggested a need for further information, dissemination of data, and discussion. Some changes can be made in the short term, while others will remain long-term goals for the program (see below).

5. Next steps

**Short term changes**

- We will offer a dissertation workshop, guided by a faculty member, every term. The first one is taking place this spring with Professor Claire Bishop. Initial response has been very positive, and we are already seeing results in terms of the quality of Dissertation Proposals produced in it.
- We will appoint a faculty mentor to oversee students applying for fellowships and jobs. This spring, the position will be held by Professor Amanda Wunder.
- We have altered the Program Handbook to clarify the role of the Second Reader. We will see how useful the new information is and whether it needs further improvement.

**Further information, dissemination, discussion**

Given the results of the student and alumni survey, it seemed advisable to survey the program’s professors also. That survey is being conducted now and the results of both will be the main topic of discussion at the program’s annual retreat, scheduled to take place the final week of May. Further decisions and implementation will likely take place then, in accordance with the priorities of the faculty.

**Long term goals**

For many of the recommended changes, we need more funding. Given the current budget situation, this will not be possible through the university in the short term. It will instead remain a long-term goal, for instance for fundraising and grant solicitation.