Assessment Review Report: Advising and Mentoring

Ph.D. Program in Art History

February 26, 2020

1. Learning Goals

This year we evaluated the institutional goal of the Graduate Center most closely aligned with advising and mentoring:

“Oral and written communication skills, other skills and experience appropriate to the discipline as required for career success.”

This was key to three learning goals of our program:

a) Students 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.

b) Students will demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches to shape research into scholarship.

c) Graduates will demonstrate professional competence in the areas in which they intend to pursue employment: college or university teaching, museum or gallery curating or administration, or art publishing. For the chosen professional field, the graduate will demonstrate knowledge of major institutions and standard procedures.

2. Data

Our data collection was multi-pronged, and involved both faculty (including the Doctoral Faculty Committee as a whole as well as the Executive Committee) and students:

a) Surveys. The student representatives for the program created and administered a complex online survey concerning mentoring and advisement in our program. With 29 responses from a student population of c. 100, this was a substantial and informative survey. The survey results will be presented to the faculty at the final meeting in May, and will serve as a major topic of discussion during our annual retreat later that month. Following the retreat, we aim to put in place further ways to institutionalize best practices.

b) Town Hall. Our fall town hall meeting, attended by about 30 students as well as four faculty members, was largely devoted to the topic of mentoring and
advisement. This was another opportunity for discussion of current practices and brainstorming for improvements.

c) **Professional Development Workshops and Practicums.** The doctoral faculty also reviewed our program-level offerings in terms of one-off workshops as well as semester-long practicums in Pedagogy, the Dissertation, Curatorial Careers, and the Careers in the Arts Workshop.

d) **Teaching Observations and Conference Presentations.** We also reviewed our students’ teaching observations, as forwarded to us for GTFs at the CUNY campuses, as well as our students’ presentations at the major conference in the field, the College Art Association.

e) **Dissertation Proposal Process.** Following discussion at our annual retreat last May, we overhauled our dissertation proposal process, putting forward a clearer rubric for the proposal as well as instituting written feedback requirements for proposals returned for major revisions. The outcome of these changes has been a recurring topic of conversation among faculty and students this year.

3. **Findings**

Our analysis suggested a number of practices that are working well:

a) **Initial Advisement.** Students are assigned an adviser, either the EO or DEO, upon arrival, and are expected to meet with that adviser once a semester until the final semester of coursework (when they pass into the hands of the dissertation adviser). Students are also assigned a peer mentor upon arrival in the program. In addition, students in coursework meet with the EO or DEO every semester for class registration. We have concluded that this system works well for most students.

b) **Regular Progress Reports.** Students receive regular progress reports, among them most importantly the second year review (in which the student discusses written progress reports from each teacher with the EO, as well as any questions/concerns the student has); and the dissertation progress reports (in which student and adviser fill out a questionnaire concerning progress on the dissertation every semester). Students who teach also receive reports every term in the form of teaching observations. Overall, this is a useful system that institutionalizes mentoring at key inflection points during students’ time at the GC.

c) **Practicum Classes.** All students are required to take the Pedagogy practicum in their first year; many also take the Curatorial Practice seminar (offered every two years) and/or the Dissertation Workshop (offered every semester; can be taken as often as desired). All are semester-long courses concerned with key aspects of professional development; we have also found them excellent opportunities for students to form mentoring/advisement relationships with faculty, often faculty outside their own area of interest.
We also found key areas in need of improvement:

a) **Dissemination of Information and Expectations.** Studying advisement and mentoring, it is clear that although our program handbook and website have some basic information, we need to clarify processes (e.g. how and when to select a dissertation adviser) and expectations (what an adviser’s role should be).

b) **Finding a Dissertation Adviser.** In our program, we have not traditionally paired students with dissertation advisers upon arrival; rather, we have expected that through taking classes, they would find one more organically. In recent years, as the number of students has shrunk, our consortial faculty especially have taught less frequently; this has complicated students’ opportunities to take classes with a range of faculty before selecting an adviser. In most cases, students manage, but this has increased advisement pressure on the (ever-diminishing) ranks of our central-line faculty. Also, when in some cases an initial adviser has left the program or hasn’t worked out, the students have fewer options. These are serious problems we need to address.

4. **Next Steps:**

a) **Dissemination of Information and Expectations.** While it is unlikely that students and faculty will ever entirely agree on expectations, our goal for the discussion of advisement in May at the faculty meeting and annual retreat is to find the common ground on what matters most, articulate it clearly, and put it in writing.

b) **Finding a Dissertation Adviser.** We are seeking an additional hire to replace recently departed central line faculty member David Joselit, and that hire would be key to lessening the pressure on central line faculty members. We are also inviting several new faculty in the CUNY system to teach next year, in hopes that some may be added in time to the doctoral faculty. At the same time, we are experimenting with other opportunities for students to meet faculty outside of classes.

c) **Peer Mentoring.** We are using one of our GAB fellowships next year to support a student who will establish a more robust peer mentoring program, similar to that in the History program, and including a schedule of workshops with faculty and student participants as well as a stronger network of peer mentors. Our hope is that giving students more responsibility and autonomy in the mentoring process will prove useful.