# HUMANITIES DEPARTMENT

Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report

Spring 2016


## Liaison Project Start Date (Semester/Year): Fall 2015
## Liaison Report prepared by Erica McCormack


Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

After several semesters of Humanities & Music department Unit-Level assessment efforts that were focused on assessing outcomes from the various Music programs (Music Education, Music Performance, Music Technology, Music Business), full-time faculty in the Humanities agreed that it was time to involve other disciplines in Unit-Level assessment. Faculty opted to turn Unit-Level assessment efforts in the direction of the art history courses since the FIN ART 107 "History of Architecture, Painting & Sculpture I" and FIN ART 108 "History of Architecture, Painting & Sculpture II" courses are required components of the AFA in Studio Art. Although this program is offered through the Art & Architecture department, those two courses are offered through the Humanities department. Our department believed that we should prioritize outcomes that relate to a degree program, and these Fine Art courses in art history are the only ones in our department outside of Music courses that are required for a particular degree.

It made the decision easier given that the current Humanities liaison is the most consistent instructor of those FIN ART courses. After discussions with the two other instructors who have consistently taught Fine Arts courses (one full-time in Art & Architecture; one part-time in Humanities), we decided to assess students on their ability to achieve the following two outcomes: 1) "Identify artistic and architectural styles from the time periods studied," and 2) "Apply key art and architectural terminology to their descriptions of artworks."


Assessment Research and Design

After discussing the SLOs that extend across the art history courses (FIN ART 105 "History of Painting, Sculpture & Architecture" in addition to FIN ART 107 and FIN ART 108), faculty agreed that the outcome we considered most important to art history students' success had to do with analysis: comparing and contrasting works of art. However, before selecting a

couple of artworks at random or based on our educated guesses about what would create a compelling compare/contrast opportunity for students and running an assessment purely focused on students' analysis skills, faculty decided that we wanted to have a better snapshot of the mental frameworks FIN ART students brought to any experience of looking at art. We decided to treat the pilot as an information-gathering mission. Faculty believed that this would allow us to use this information later in order to construct a more thoughtful and streamlined analysis assessment. We therefore chose to wait on assessing the analysis skill and instead begin by assessing these two outcomes, which overlap all three courses: 1) "Identify artistic and architectural styles from the time periods studied," and 2) "Apply key art and architectural terminology to their descriptions of artworks."

In the Fall 2015 semester, art history faculty constructed an assessment that involved showing thirteen artworks, all of which the three faculty members ensured were not specifically discussed in any of their courses but which represented styles that were treated in at least two of the three courses (FIN ART 107 and FIN ART 108 address different periods of time, and FIN ART 105 addresses all of them but in a more cursory way).

Students were given two minutes on each artwork to offer some initial thoughts (keywords) about formal elements, subject matter, medium, and historical period, culture, and style.  We wanted students to provide us with some insight about what they would think about a new artwork upon encountering it in a museum or gallery and to reveal how they would draw on their previous exposure to art historical periods and styles to notice connections in subject matter, formal elements, and/or media. In doing so, students would reveal their learning related to those two outcomes.

In the Fall 2015 semester, the liaison created a basic rubric with the intention to revise it once the data was collected and we had a better sense of what could be accomplished in a two-minute window.


Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

After constructing the 13-artwork assessment, we ran the pilot assessment in Week 13 of the Fall 2015 semester, across four sections taught by three instructors: one section of FIN ART 105, one section of FIN ART 107, and two sections of FIN ART 108. A total of 86 students completed the assessment (24 from FIN ART 105 + 26 from FIN ART 107 + 36 from FIN ART 108).

Administer Specific Assessment

We hoped that the data from the pilot would yield some clear feedback that we could use to influence a compare/contrast analytical assessment for the Fine Arts courses to pilot in the Spring 2016 semester. Unfortunately, the data-recording and analysis phases of the process hit a snag (as explained in the next section) in the Spring 2016 semester that should have been anticipated but was not.

Data Analysis

As the Humanities Unit-Level Liaison, I began analyzing the data in the Spring 2016 semester. A large portion of the Spring 2016 semester was dedicated to creating more elaborate rubrics (one for each artwork, each rubric with many dimensions due to the open format of the test document) and then building a Google form reflecting that rubric structure. Once it was completed, I began the slow process of inputting the data, but before too long, I realized that I needed to reformat the form in order to include a "blank" option for each question to avoid mistaking a lack of information for incorrect information (Appendix A).

As the semester concluded without that process completed for all 86 student entries, I realized that the format was still ultimately not as useful as it needed to be in order to get the information I needed in order to move onto the next phase of assessment in art history. I realized that what I actually needed was not to capture every word that each student wrote down, but instead to differentiate correct answers from totally incorrect answers and from "interestingly" incorrect answers since those interesting incorrect answers will inform our future assessments (Appendix B).

The origin of the problem with data entry and analysis had to do with our decision to use such a bulky assessment that was trying to do too many things instead of offering students a Scantron-based multiple choice version of the thirteen artwork assessment using our hypotheses of concepts students may have considered relevant. When developing the assessment, it seemed important to have students provide relevant terms and concepts without relying on recognition of a proper term. In retrospect, however, that decision was not worth all the other complications it caused.

I initially anticipated that using Google Forms for data entry would itself yield clarity (observing General Education assessment work had convinced me of Google Forms' utility for putting data into a format so that it could be analyzed and interpreted easily). However, instead, it turned into a behemoth such that for every student's test, 147 separate pieces of data had to be submitted, making input take around 30 minutes per test. I could have perhaps been steered away from this course if I had spoken to our Data Analyst during the assessment design phase, but at that point, we had only one analyst working with our

general education as well as six liaisons' assessment data. I opted to wait to use his services until after I had data so as not to overburden him. Now, thankfully, we have two data analysts to handle the large quantity of data being generated by our committee members, so I feel more comfortable engaging their expertise in the planning process and will hopefully avoid making these foreseeable mistakes again.

Supporting Evidence-Based Change (Use of Findings)

Once the data has been fully analyzed using our more informal but ultimately more useful rubric for our current purposes (Appendix B), art history faculty will construct a Multiple Choice exam to run in Fall 2016 based on what we begin to notice are common misunderstandings. That will then help us refine our understanding of student learning and use that to inform pedagogical and curricular changes in order to maximize future student learning.

Success Factors

Although this report has focused primarily on the decisions made in the planning, execution, and analysis phases of the pilot that led to problems, there have been successes. Non-musicians within the Humanities department have become more invested in assessment conversations, and we look forward to expanding these in future semesters as our work progresses.

Additionally, there is nothing like making a mistake (or series of mistakes) to teach one to reflect and change policies. Each mistake was made with the best of intentions and plenty of thought, which just reinforces the importance of prioritizing particular questions in the planning process. Everything we have learned from this failed pilot is going to make our future assessment efforts more coherent.

Recommendations

This pilot led to recommendations primarily focused on the assessment process rather than on the content about student learning. Now that we have two data analysts on the HWCAC, I recommend all liaisons consider consulting with one of them during the planning process so that they can troubleshoot and avoid scenarios like this one.

In order to ensure that our entire pilot was not a waste, we will use our Fine Arts information about correct, "interestingly incorrect," and "other incorrect answers" to influence the creation of a multiple choice, Scantron-based assessment to run in art history courses during the Fall 2016 semester. During this same semester, the Humanities general

education assessment will be taken by students in sections across the college. That Humanities assessment will be essay-based, so it is not ideal timing to initiate another essay-based assessment in art history. Instead, we will use the opportunity to run the pilot that we should have run in the first place.

The other recommendation has to do with not losing sight of the importance of breaking off manageable, discrete chunks, even when a department is multiple semesters into their unit-level assessment work and thinks they can therefore handle that complexity. Our department did manage to deal with complexity by constructing multiple detailed rubrics, but all that did was take us far into the process before realizing that we would have been able to answer our questions about student learning much better if we had conducted a simpler assessment. A simple format does not necessarily mean that one will gather uninteresting data.

## Appendix A: Example of Initial Detailed Rubric for Pilot (Artwork 5)

| | Accurate with elaboration | Partially accurate or vague | Inaccurate | I do not believe I have ever studied anything like this* | Nothing entered |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Style** | Rococo | Baroque | (Other) | Ok if FA107, not if FA 105 or FA108 | |
| **Historical time period** | 1770 (+/- 25 years) | +/- 50 years | Over 50 years incorrect | " | |
| **Cultural Tradition** | French | European | (Other) | " | |
| **Medium Selected** | Oil painting (on canvas) | Painting (on canvas) | (Other) | " | |
| **Medium Keywords** | Oil, canvas | | | " | |
| **Subject Matter** | 3+: Woman, aristocrat/elite, letter, bouquet dog, fabric, luxury. | 2: Woman, aristocrat/elite, letter, bouquet dog, fabric, luxury. | No more than 1: Woman, aristocrat/elite, letter, bouquet dog, fabric, luxury. (or Other) | " | |
| **Formal Elements selected** | Two or more relevant to painting selected | One relevant to painting selected | Irrelevant one(s) selected | " | |

| Formal Elements Keywords | 2: Pastel colors, loose brushstrokes, lighting, etc. | 1: Pastel colors, loose brushstrokes, lighting, etc. | (Other) | " | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## Appendix B: Example of Revised and Simplified Rubric for Pilot* (Artwork 1)

| | Style | Historical Time Period | Cultural Tradition | Medium | Subject Matter | Formal Elements |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1: Correct Answers** | Black figure | Archaic, c. 530 BCE | Ancient Greek (Aegean/European) | Ceramic | Panathenaic/ Athletic amphora | Amphora, black figure, glaze |
| **1: Correct Tally** | 105: 107: 1 108: | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| **1: Interestingly Incorrect** | 105: 107: 108: | | Hinduism, Egypt (2), Roman | | | |

*Still in process