History of Art and Architecture

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the B.A. and M.A. degree in Art History.

The Review Process

The Department is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), which places primary emphasis on demonstrated compliance with a set of artistic and design-based academic criteria for the programs an institution offers. NASAD is the recognized accreditor for U.S. freestanding institutions and units offering art/design and art/design-related degree programs.

The NASAD-AQAD cycle in 2014-15 provided the first opportunity for external review of the newly-named Department of History of Art and Architecture after its organizational split from the Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History. The results of the 2014-15 NASAD review of the Department are reported here. NASAD reviewers were:

Robert Milnes, University of North Texas, Team Chair
Jack Risley, University of Texas

Main Issues

The external report described a “well-developed” Department that reflects strengths in strategic planning, program development, new governance structures and new facilities that benefit the students and teachers, particularly in light of the recent division of the three departments into standalone units. The committee remarked on the broad-based B.A. program in Art History that prepares students for further education and museum occupations. It also noted that the M.A. program in Art History is the only one of its kind at a publicly sponsored institution of higher learning in New England and has an excellent track record of placements in respected, private Ph.D. programs as well as highly-quality positions at museums, publishing houses, and non-profit organizations.

Among the highlights chronicled in the NASAD review were the commitment and quality of the faculty; new governance structures vis-à-vis the departments’ establishment, which have boosted morale and created a new vision of excellence for the academic programs; significant hires that added diversity, expertise and a new curricular focus; ample provision of time for faculty research and professional development opportunities; selective admissions policies at both the bachelor’s and master’s level; excellent financial support along with teaching opportunities for graduate students; evidence of student-faculty interaction in the programming, including at the Department’s diverse and active gallery exhibition space; and ample access to art history course offerings for non-majors and to the general public.

1 NASAD declined to include the third sub-unit—the Department of Architecture—in its 2014-15 review. NASAD had previously evaluated the Interior Design program of the combined, three-unit department but since the departmental split in fall 2014, all of the programs offered by the new Department of Architecture no longer fall under NASAD’s purview.
Of the fifteen standards required for NASAD accreditation, the review team found no major issues of non-compliance. The format of the review committee’s report allowed them to make a series of recommendations for short-term improvement, to point out a set of primary future issues about which the Department should remain vigilant, and to offer suggestions for long-term development strategies. A summary of the comments from these three categories follows:

- **Recommendations for Short-Term Improvement:** Diminished enrollments over the last two years should be addressed through recruitment efforts; additional exhibition opportunities for advanced and graduate students are needed; the Department should review the process by which library purchases and requests are made, especially given the reliance on faculty members’ “home libraries” to aid student research, and the difficulty of accessing digital media tools; and provisions should be made for junior and senior Art History majors to gain access to studio arts courses, permitting them to complete a minor in Art.

- **Primary Future Issues:** The three newly-established Departments (Department of History of Art and Architecture, Department of Art, and Department of Architecture) are encouraged to maintain close connections to develop further synergies, especially through their shared Foundations course; recent recruitment problems should be monitored and new strategies created if enrollment numbers do not rebound; and robust engagement with the University-wide strategic planning process may help to address priorities and illuminate new funding opportunities.

- **Suggestions for Long-Term Development:** Enhancements to the diversity of faculty, student body and programs will address changes in the art and design world; the Department’s mission should be clarified relative to other art history programs in the region, with a particular emphasis on building collaborations; greater coordination of exhibition facilities on-campus will help clarify missions, avoid duplication of shows and purposes, and help accelerate student learning and engagement; and a greater level of interaction with nearby communities will help expand student recruitment.

### Results of the Review

The Department of History of Art and Architecture discussed the report prepared by the external reviewers and offered a number of responses to their recommendations. Given that no circumstances of non-compliance were found by the NASAD review committee pertaining to the Department, these responses generally corrected typographical errors and only offered minor clarifications and reinforcement to especially important points.

### Outcomes Assessment

The Department of History of Art and Architecture has an established set of student learning objectives for the undergraduate major and graduate program, which include developing an understanding of the visual language of style; the terminology, technology and diversity of artistic media; the nature of the creative process and the role of artists who have shaped the history of visual arts; and many other competencies. The department primarily relies on one direct measure to verify the extent to which students have met learning objectives: assessment of their performance in critical writing, through evaluation of an assignment from the junior-year writing course and the senior-year integrative experience course.

### Student Retention and Graduation Rates

Most of the Department’s majors declare as sophomores or juniors, not during their freshman year. Thus, the data provided by the Office of Institutional Research on first-year retention rates
are of limited value. Additionally, the numbers of declared student majors in Art History and eventual graduates are small enough that no significant trends can be determined.