

2015–2017 ASSESSMENT REPORT for EMORY ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Art History Department
October 2, 2017

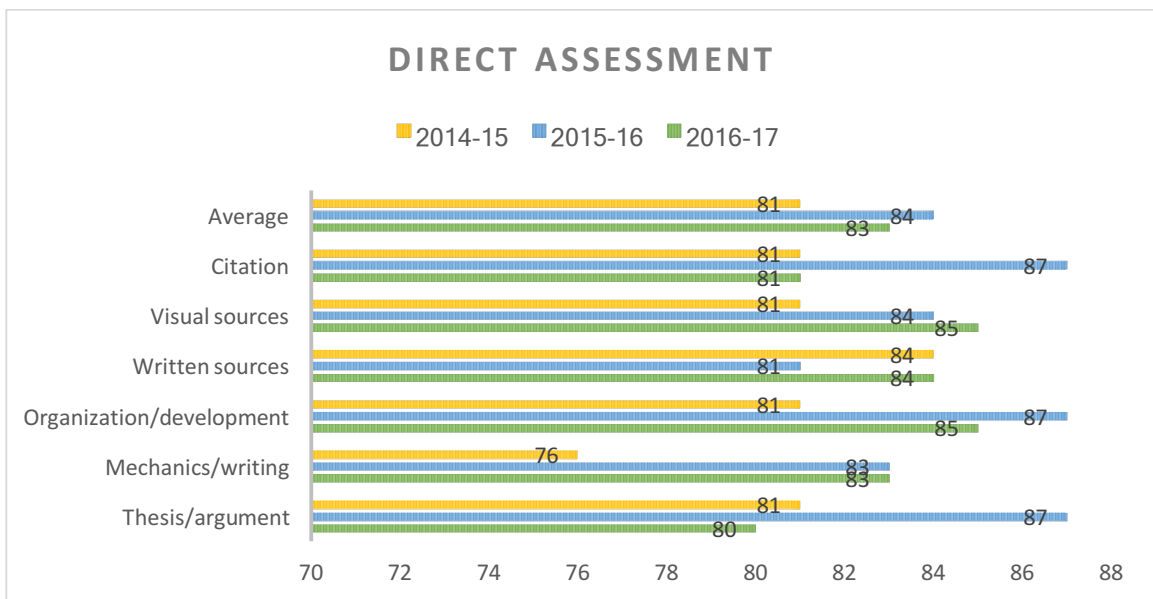
The Art History Department meets annually in mid-September to discuss the undergraduate program and review the results of its assessment exercise. Led by the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the meeting involves every member of the department not on leave, faculty ranging in rank from assistant to full professor, some of whom have taught at Emory for thirty years or more and some who have only just arrived. Since 2009, our department has used two methods to measure student achievement of our designated learning outcomes: the assessment of seminar papers and the analysis of a Senior Exit Survey administered to all graduating Art History majors and minors. In this cycle, we have also taken into account the results of the senior survey administered by the University Office of Planning & Budgeting, which show our department out-performing the college as a whole in nearly every category.

Direct Assessment

Methodology. Our primary direct method of assessment is the evaluation of every 400-level seminar paper submitted by a senior Art History major during the academic year. The seminars focus on a particular area of study within art history, and although they have no prerequisites and are open to non-majors, they are designed with advanced art-history students in mind; our majors are required to take at least one. All seminars are writing-intensive and involve a substantial cumulative project.

In our process, each faculty member is assigned from two or four papers to assess. To keep the evaluation as unbiased as possible, we ensure that faculty read papers from courses other than their own, and that the papers are read blind. Each is assessed according to a rubric developed and periodically revised by the department, which identifies six components of a successful research paper in art history (see attachment). The rubric was designed to ensure some degree of consistency in evaluation, allowing faculty members to judge the papers according to a shared set of criteria, ranking each component on a four-point scale. To correct for subjective judgment, each paper is evaluated by two readers and the scores averaged.

Findings.



In 2016, the overall average score was 20.35 out of a possible 24 points (four points for each of the six components), or 84%; in 2017, it was 19.89, or 83%. As the chart above attests, the scores vary predictably from year to year, but the ratings consistently fall within the acceptable (“good”) range. Last year we were struck by the marked improvement in the students’ use of visual evidence, an ability that is, of course, fundamental to art-historical writing. Since 2013, when our senior papers showed a disappointing weakness in that area, we have made a concerted effort to hone our students’ skills, and it is gratifying to see a steady rise in that analytical component. On the whole, however, the scores do not form an especially meaningful pattern. In 2015, the average paper earned a “grade” of B-; this year it was a solid B, last year it was a B+. We can say, then, that our students graduate with a writing ability that is solidly above average.

Our evaluation has been slightly more challenging in this assessment cycle because several of the papers depart from the standard format and traditional purpose of a research paper. Exciting new genres of scholarship, such as research proposals, conservation reports, and online exhibition texts, are increasingly appearing in lieu of the research paper as our faculty explore creative and innovative approaches to art-historical scholarship: even at the undergraduate level, art history is moving rapidly toward the digital humanities. If the trend continues, we may need to revise or expand the first element of our evaluation so that the thesis-driven research paper is regarded as only one of several acceptable formats. It may also be necessary to revise the rubric we use for evaluation. Our discussion concluded with the decision to wait and revisit the issue in two more years, when we’ll have more data to go on and a better idea of the direction our assignments are tending to take.

Indirect Assessment

Methodology. Our primary indirect method of assessment entails the tabulation, summary, analysis, and discussion of the Senior Exit Survey, which all majors and minors are required to complete before graduation. Recognizing that students often possess remarkable insight into their own learning, we are interested to learn how they view their own achievement of our three Student Learning Goals, or core competencies, for art history:

1. Graduates should be able to describe and analyze works of art and architecture, taking into account form, function, and meaning.
2. Graduates should be able to recognize and interpret a wide range of artistic traditions and cultural monuments, as well as to situate them in chronological order.
3. Graduates should be able to write a research paper combining primary and secondary sources into a persuasive argument.

In the first part of the survey, students are asked to assess the degree to which they feel they have achieved each of these three competencies. In the second part, they are asked to respond to broader, more open-ended questions. In this assessment cycle we added two new questions, nos. 3 and 4.

1. What aspects of your education in this department helped you learn effectively, and how were they helpful?
2. What might the department have done differently that would have helped you learn more effectively, and why would these actions have helped?
3. How has the visual arts requirement been relevant and useful to your study of art history?*

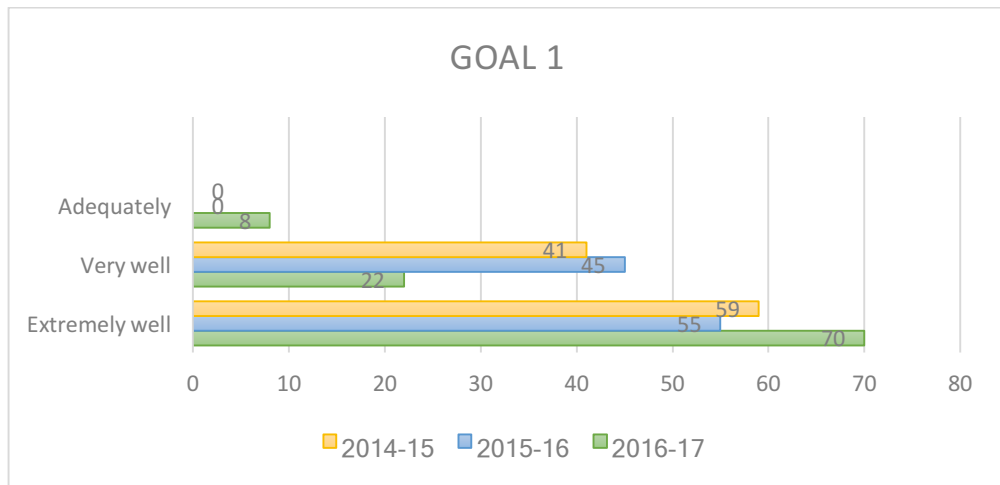
* Art history majors and minors are required to take one of the two Foundations in Art Practices courses (ARTHIST 111 and 112) or some other course in studio art.

- How have you been able to integrate your Art History major with your liberal arts education as a whole?

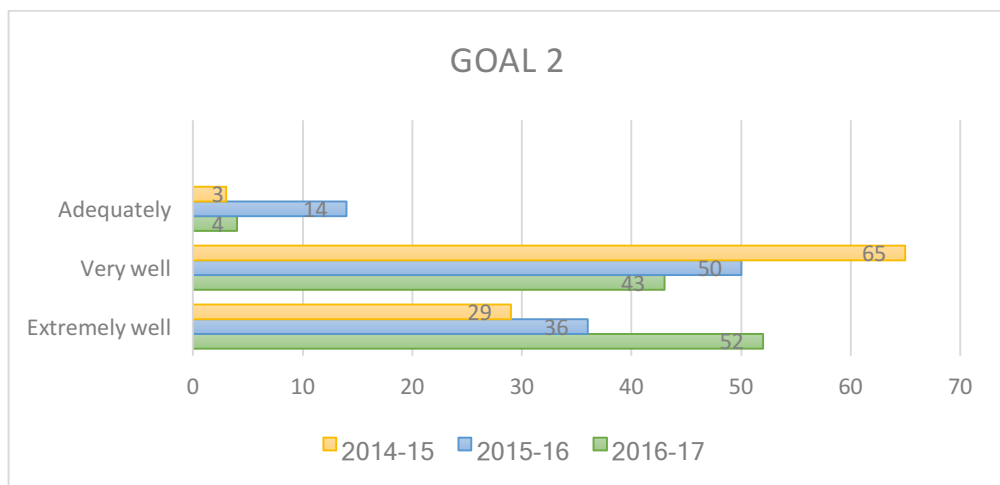
Forty-five graduating art-history students completed the Senior Exit Survey in the two years under review. The DUS tabulated the students' self-assessments and analyzed the results in relation to previous years' responses. Those results, together with a summary of student answers to the survey questions, were gathered and summarized for discussion by the department. The faculty received packets of these materials, with instructions, one week before each assessment meeting.

Findings.

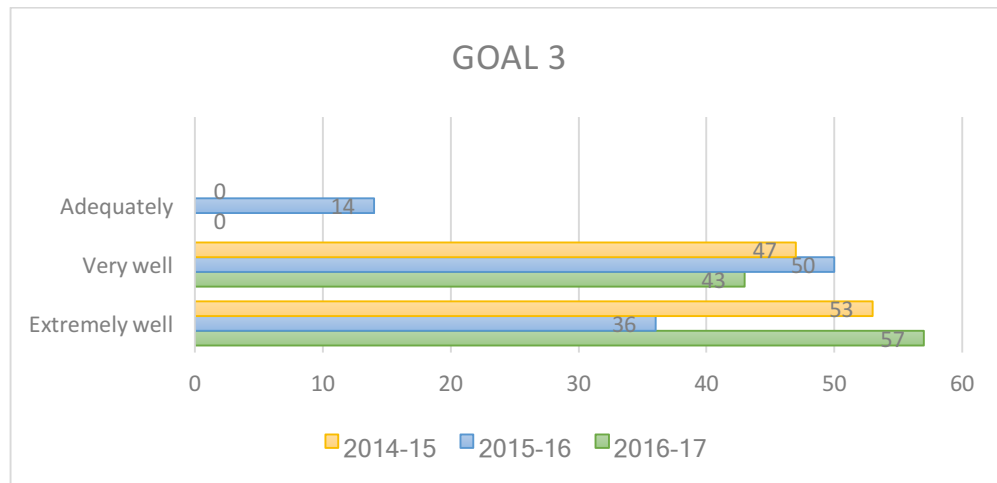
GOAL 1: Graduates should be able to describe and analyze works of art and architecture, taking into account form, function, and meaning, while demonstrating a command of art-historical language.



GOAL 2: Graduates should be able to recognize and interpret a wide range of artistic traditions and cultural monuments, as well as to situate them in chronological order.



GOAL 3: Graduates should be able to write a research paper combining primary and secondary sources into a persuasive argument.



Student Learning Goals. The data reveal that a majority of students consider themselves at least very strong in all three proficiencies, with the weakest scores falling in Student Learning Goal 2—although the percentage of students who felt extremely confident in their ability to recognize and interpret art-historical movements and periods rose 16 points from 2016 to 2017. In fact, student confidence rose in all three goals in 2016–17, when 70% of the students believed themselves exceptionally capable of analyzing works of art and architecture according to their form, function, and meaning; and 57%—more than half, up from 36% in 2016 and surpassing even the previous high of 53%—graduated with complete confidence in their ability to make a persuasive argument in a research paper.

Open-ended survey questions. Answers to the questions on the second part of the Exit Survey reveal that our students have an overwhelmingly positive experience with their teachers in the Art History Department: evidently, our faculty is our greatest asset. “They were very passionate about art and their research,” one student said of her teachers, “which made me more passionate myself.” The professors encourage students to perceive art in different ways by employing various methodologies and activities in class. As one student concluded, “The department faculty made the experience of learning art history captivating, which made me as a student want to pay attention and succeed.” The students report that their teachers often took the time to work with students one on one, and their rigorous assignments and high academic standards were widely agreed to have helped improve writing skills, particularly the ability to make a persuasive argument.

The students surveyed particularly like discussion-based courses—particularly seminars—which compel them to think critically and allow them to learn from their classmates, thereby fostering collaboration and engagement with their peers. They recognize the advantage of small classes, which are the rule in Art History, and they appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of our curriculum. Somewhat to our surprise, several students name the distribution requirements for the major as one of the most positive aspects of their degree, as it led them to think about and analyze forms of art with which they might otherwise have remained forever unfamiliar, and to gain exposure to fascinating subjects they might never have considered studying on their own. While some say they enjoy the focused, upper-level courses, others wish for more comprehensive, survey-type ones; some praise the variety of courses offered by the department, others complain about the limited offerings. They specifically request a more diverse (particularly non-Western) range of courses, including Asian, and Islamic art, and ask for more offerings in modern and contemporary art. Several students would welcome courses in museum studies. They almost unanimously express satisfaction with the way the department engages with the rich resources of the Carlos Museum, “an exceptional aid that helped illustrate and cement key concepts taught in class.” Looking closely at actual works of art caused students to pay close attention to details

and to think critically about what they were seeing. Our students love the opportunity to look at art first hand, away from slides on the screen, and only wish they were given more chances to visit local galleries and art museums with faculty.

In 2015, we heard from several students that the department lacked a sense of community. Perhaps because of our efforts, in response, to build that community, only a couple of students voiced the complaint in 2016 that they felt disconnected from the department as a whole, and by 2017, the problem appears to have gone away.

The students overwhelmingly approve of the visual arts requirement. Even those who feel they lack talent and consider studio art a challenge recognize its importance to their understanding of art history. “It definitely gave me a new, deeper perspective,” one student wrote, and another said, “This experience gave great insight into how an artwork is created.” Making art themselves gives students a greater appreciation for the time, skill, and effort that goes into any creation, allows them to assume the artist’s perspective, lends insight into the mediums and materials of art, and generally adds a valuable dimension to their art-historical studies. There are those, of course, who consider the visual arts course “an exciting addition” to the major but not necessarily a useful one, and others who think it would be more valuable to take a class in painting or drawing “to develop a stronger sense of composition and formal qualities.” Only one student complains that the instructors’ expectations are too high, when “not everyone is a natural-born artist.” For the third year in a row, several student plead for more studio art courses. “So sad this department is gone! I honestly do think all visual art classes help so much in understanding art history.”

Our students respond with gratifying unanimity to the value of art history to their education as a whole. One student writes that choosing to major in art history “was one of the greatest choices I made at Emory,” as it provided a broad base of historical knowledge and developed her own ideas about art. Students recognize art history as a highly intellectual pursuit based on the very skills they will need in whatever professions they choose to follow—thinking critically, writing cogently, researching effectively, and managing their time. They find that art history connects in many ways with courses in English, psychology, history, religion, even business; several STEM majors observe that art history was not only a happy complement to their scientific studies, but that it sharpened the analytical skills they need to interpret scientific data. Finally, our students acknowledge the benefit of art history to their sense of themselves as educated adults, as it widened their horizons and broadened their perspective and, on the whole, made them “overall more creative, thoughtful, and visual”: “My art history classes have made me a better student and a better writer and a better human,” one student remarks. Another says that art history didn’t simply show “how to appreciate a work of art as a thing of beauty,” but also “how art represents something much larger about the world in which it was created.”

Summary & analysis of results

Our assessment this cycle reveals that in AYs 2015-16 and 2016-17, from 90 to 100% of art history students graduated with the ability to describe and analyze works of art using the appropriate art-historical terminology *more than adequately*. The percentage of students who consider themselves capable of recognizing and interpreting most artistic traditions and cultural monuments rose to 95% in 2017, when *one hundred percent* of our students felt *very to extremely capable* of writing a persuasive research paper that combines primary and secondary sources. The data reflect the predictable ebb and flow of student dedication and competence from year to year, but on the whole the numbers suggest reassuring progress in all areas. The direct assessment, while less conclusive, may be even more predictable, with the average grade for a senior art history paper continuing to fall comfortably in the B range.

2017 Senior Survey Results for Art History

We have begun to take advantage of another assessment tool provided by Emory College shortly before our assessment exercise each fall. The College Senior Survey, administered by the University Office of Planning & Budgeting, gives us additional data to consider in assessing the experience of our undergraduates. The results

for Art History (attached) tell us that our percentages for overall academic experience, quality of instruction, and course content have held steady for two years and in all three areas remain considerably higher than the College average: 100% of art history majors are satisfied with the quality of instruction in this department. The survey also reveals that our students have become happier with their advisors and the value of information they provide; and in the area of faculty helpfulness, our department scored 100's in every category. These results confirm the findings of our own department survey, including student discontent with the availability of courses they wish to take (although that percentage is much improved this year—up to 78% from 67% satisfaction in 2016); but even here, our department's average is higher than that of the College. We are intrigued by the facts that more than half of our students studied abroad during their time at Emory (20% more than the College average) and held off-campus internships (67%, in contrast to the College average of 53%), and we have begun thinking about ways to use those distinctions to help bring students into the major. Another potentially significant fact is that an extraordinarily high proportion of art history majors have a second major—56% (up from 44% last year), as compared to the College average of 33%.

Action plan

Our department is addressing the findings of this assessment in the following ways:

1. In response to student comments two years ago that the department lacked a sense of community, we began organizing regular (monthly) activities to offer our majors and minors a chance to get to know each other and the faculty better. We now have a full slate of activities that is announced and publicized within the first month of each semester. Each October, we host a pizza party for majors, minors, and prospective majors and minors, when we introduce the programs, prizes, and opportunities our department has to offer in a relaxed and convivial setting. We regularly organize student events at the Carlos Museum, including special exhibition tours when the museum is closed to the public; and when scholars and curators visit the department we try to offer our undergraduates a chance to meet with them. In 2016, we sponsored a public lecture on Carlos Hall to celebrate the centenary of our building, in which our students take great pride. And we continue to hold a careers forum each February to introduce students to the variety of ways that an art history degree can support a professional life.
2. We have restructured the Honors program to include a series of research and writing workshops designed to guide our students through the thesis process and to mitigate the isolation that intensive scholarship can bring. We have better publicized the fall symposium, when Honors students present their research-in-progress, which has resulted in a much-improved level of attendance. Acknowledging that the number of Honors students in our department has fallen in recent years, we identify prospective candidates early in their junior year and actively encourage their applications.
3. We redesigned our senior survey to provide more specific and useful information about our students' experience in art history, and we have been encouraged by the response. The two new questions (How has the visual-arts requirement been relevant and useful to your study of art history? And, How have you been able to integrate your major with your liberal arts education as a whole?) yield impassioned responses from the students, who greatly value their training in studio art as part of their degree and recognize the advantages that their art-history major brought to their college career.
4. Without a larger faculty, we cannot fully address the frequent complaint that not enough courses are offered by our department, but we are taking a step in that direction by offering a course in Impressionism in the spring (it has in fact been offered twice in the past seven years, but that is not often enough to satisfy student demand). We are also exploring the possibility of a new course (ARTHIST 393) specifically designed to strengthen student research skills.

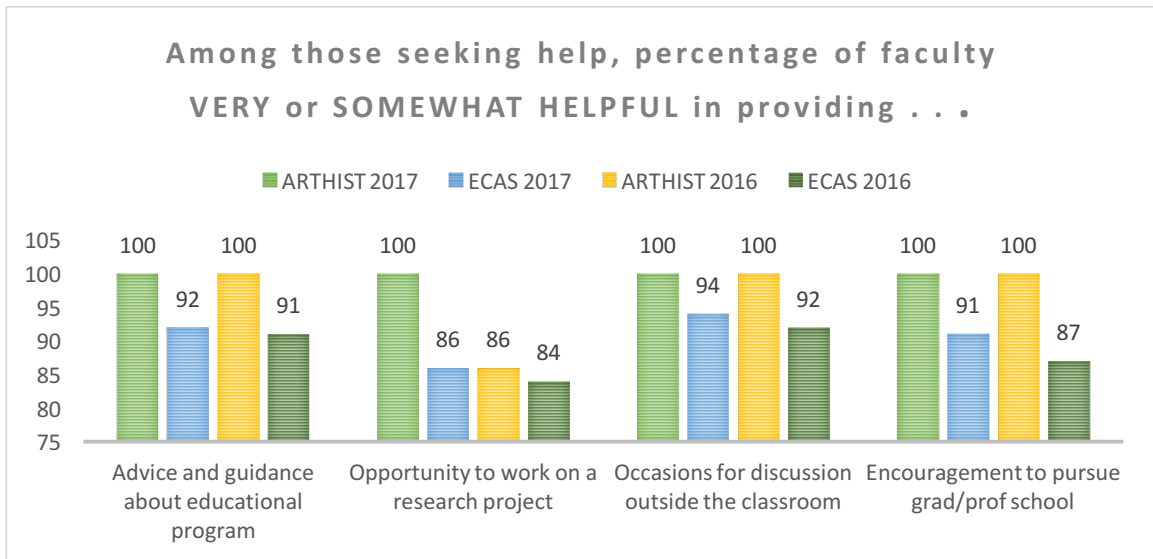
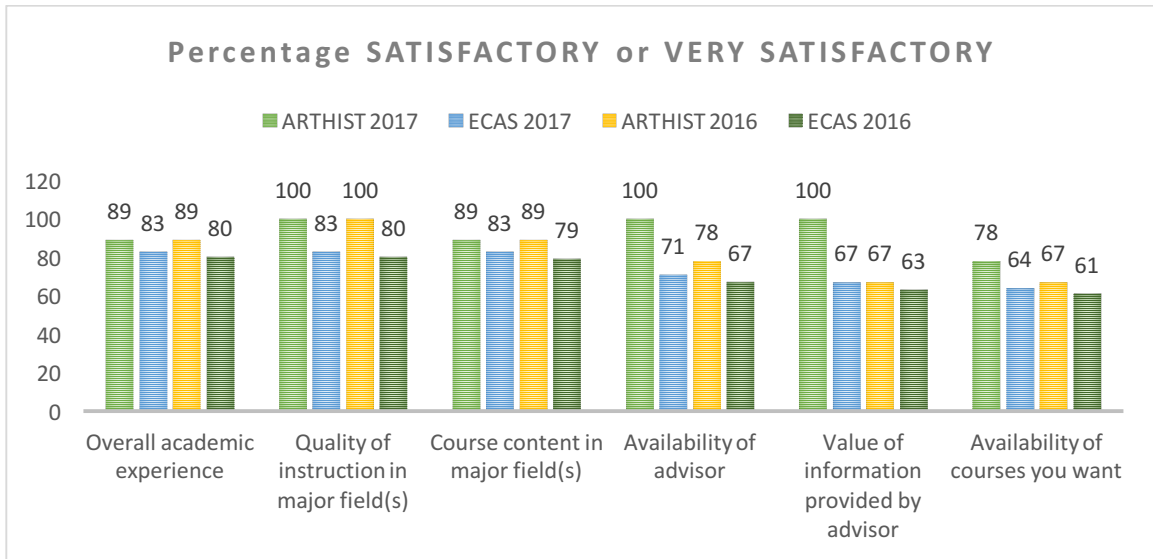
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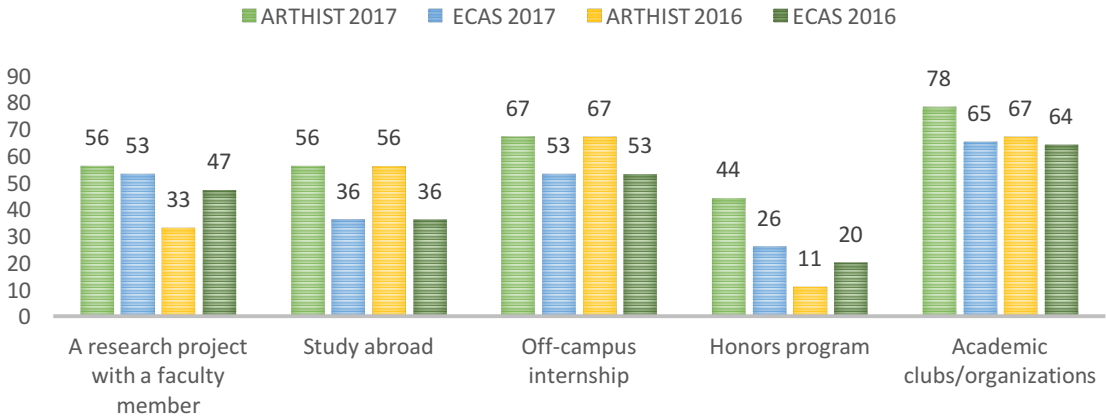
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2017 Senior Survey Results for ART HISTORY

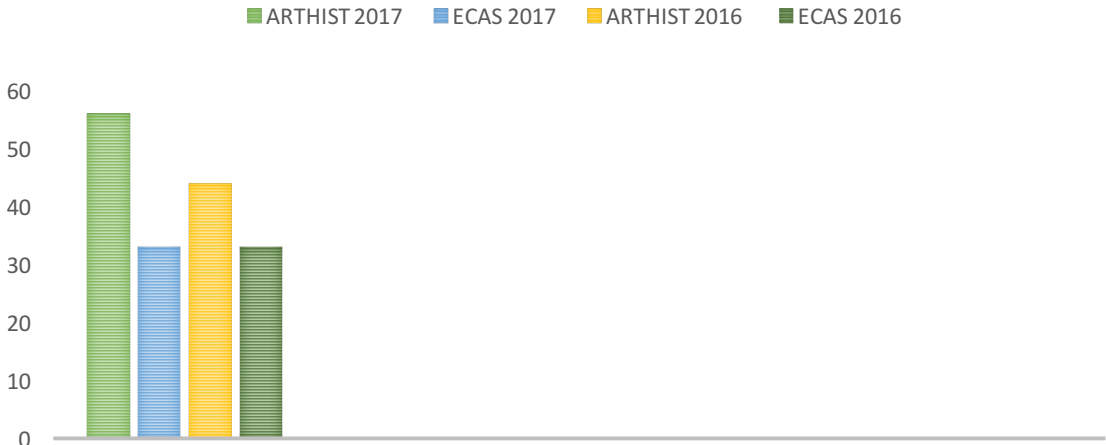
These tables record our department's results from the ECAS 2016 Senior Survey administered by the University Office of Planning & Budgeting.



Percentage of students who participated in . . .



Percentage of students with two majors



Art History Department SENIOR EXIT SURVEY

As part of its re-accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Emory College requires every department to submit a Learning Assessment Plan for its undergraduate majors, outlining its goals for student learning and the ways that the achievement of those goals will be assessed. One method of assessment is this Senior Exit Survey, which every art history major must complete before graduation.

Thank you for helping the department with its assessment plan. Your ideas and opinions will be carefully considered and will help us strengthen the art history program. Please rest assured that your responses will remain confidential.

Please tell us what you are: _____ Art History Major _____ AH/Hist Joint Major
 _____ Art History Minor _____ Architectural Studies Minor

For each of the three Student Learning Goals listed below, please indicate how well the objective has been met in your case.

1. Graduates should be able to describe and analyze works of art and architecture, taking into account form, function, and meaning while demonstrating a command of art historical language.

extremely well	very well	adequately	not very well	not at all

2. Graduates should possess a broad cultural and chronological knowledge base of a variety of artistic traditions and their monuments.

extremely well	very well	adequately	not very well	not at all

3. Graduates should be able to write a research paper combining primary and secondary sources into a persuasive argument.

extremely well	very well	adequately	not very well	not at all

1. Please tell us what aspects of your education in this department helped you learn effectively, and how they were helpful.

2. Please tell us what the department might have done *differently* that would have helped you learn more effectively, and how those actions would have helped.

3. How has the visual arts requirement been relevant and useful to your study of art history?

4. How have you been able to integrate your Art History major with your liberal arts education as a whole?

Thank you! Please keep in touch.

Grading Rubric for Art History Research Papers

Goal 3: Graduates should be able to write a research paper combining primary and secondary sources into a persuasive argument.

Components	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Needs improvement (2)	Poor (1)
I. Thesis/ Argument	Paper has a clearly stated and consistently developed thesis, marked by originality.	Paper has a thesis, but reader must reconstruct it from the text.	Vague thesis, not central to the argument. Argument is discursive, tends to merely narrate or digress from one topic to another.	No thesis is articulated. (Paper is mostly a list of facts.)
II. Mechanics/ Writing Quality	All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written, with good transitions, precise wording, and no spelling errors. Tone is scholarly, non-colloquial.	Most sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. Occasional imprecise word or misuse of a word, or spelling error, which do not adversely affect scholarly tone.	Several sentences are grammatically incorrect or not clearly written. Several words are misused and misspelled, compromising the scholarly tone.	Paper is full of grammatical errors, unclear writing, misuse of words, and spelling errors. No scholarly tone.
III. Organization/ Development	Paper contains an introduction, main body, and conclusion. Introduction lays out the main argument (thesis) and gives an outline of what to expect in the paper. The argument is well anchored and developed in the main body of the text. The conclusion brings everything together, acknowledges possible shortcomings of the paper, and suggests what further work might be done to advance the subject matter of the paper.	Paper contains an introduction, main body, and conclusion. Introduction lays out the main argument (thesis), but gives little idea of what to expect in the paper. The argument is poorly anchored and barely developed in the main body of the text. The conclusion summarizes the main argument and evidence, but does not move beyond what was presented in the paper.	Paper contains an introduction, main body, and conclusion. Introduction gives an idea of what to expect in the paper, but does not effectively lay out the main argument (thesis). It may begin with a set of rhetorical questions, or an anecdote that is never fully explained. The argument is not developed in the main body of the text. The conclusion does little more than restate the problematic introduction. Introduction and/or conclusion may be too wordy or too short.	Paper has no clear organizational pattern.
IV. Written Sources	Paper demonstrates sophisticated use of both primary (when applicable) and secondary written sources to support a persuasive argument.	Paper demonstrates sufficient, but unsophisticated use of primary (when applicable) and secondary written sources to support a persuasive argument.	Paper ineptly deploys minimal written sources. Argument is not persuasively supported.	Paper deploys few, if any, secondary written sources or only historical generalities as evidence. No support of argument.

<p style="text-align: center;">V. Visual Sources</p>	<p>Paper demonstrates sophisticated use of visual evidence in the conceptual and physical structure of the paper to support a persuasive argument.</p>	<p>Paper demonstrates sufficient, but unsophisticated, use of visual evidence in the paper to support a persuasive argument.</p>	<p>Paper deploys insufficient use of visual evidence in the paper. Argument is not persuasively supported.</p>	<p>Paper deploys no analysis of visual evidence. No support of argument.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">VI. Citation</p>	<p>All evidence is properly cited in footnotes or endnotes.</p>	<p>All evidence is cited in footnotes or endnotes, but there are some minor problems with completeness or format of some citations.</p>	<p>Some pieces of evidence are unreferenced or inaccurately referenced, and there are problems with completeness and format of citations.</p>	<p>Paper demonstrates little or no citing of evidence.</p>

Rev. Sept 2012