Art History Academic Learning Compact

# Description of the Academic Program:

Ideas about what counts as art vary across different times and places, and even within particular cultures. While only some forms of human activity are (or have been) viewed as art, human beings are united by the desire to respond to and represent their existence in creative ways that transcend strictly utilitarian purposes. Art history offers a range of tools and lenses for analyzing the varied forms and functions of this creative drive, and therefore for understanding the global, interconnected cultures in which we live. Art history is no longer limited to its traditional focus on the fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, and now encompasses other artifacts of material culture, such as ceramics, textiles, or advertisements, as well as postmodern and contemporary artworks that are more about concepts or relationships than material objects. Art historians study the ways in which these artworks and artifacts shape and were shaped by their historical context(s). By looking at how cultures in different time periods have defined, experienced, and participated in artistic activity, art history students develop an informed understanding of human creativity and diversity, while sharpening their skills in visual and verbal analysis. They are encouraged to develop and pursue their own intellectual interests, formulating their own critical approaches to the material and arriving at their own definitions of what constitutes “art.”

With these goals in mind, the area of concentration in art history emphasizes: 1) coursework that, grounded in the study of specific time periods, promotes historical awareness and some chronological breadth of knowledge; 2) coursework with a thematic, global, or studio art focus; 3) a theory and method course that introduces students to a variety of critical frameworks central to art history (including, but not limited to, social history, semiotics, feminist and gender theory, critical race and post-colonial theory, and globalization); 4) foreign language study; and 5) the application of art historical knowledge in the context of an internship. Students are also encouraged to pursue opportunities for study and travel abroad.

Direct contact with artworks and artifacts and applied, hands-on learning is an essential component of the program. The Ringling Museum of Art, adjacent to New College, is a particularly rich source of these kinds of experiences, but students also benefit from opportunities at institutions like the Sarasota Art Museum and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Students can deepen their engagement with museums even further by combining an area of concentration in Art History with a secondary field in Museum Studies.

# Expected Outcomes:

The table below lists the expected learning outcomes for a student who completes an area of concentration in Art History, with an indication of which of the outcomes highlighted by the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida (content/discipline knowledge and skills, communication skills, and critical thinking skills) they primarily address.

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| **Expected Outcomes for Art History Area of Concentration** | **Content** | **Communication** | **Critical Thinking** |
| 1. Students use discipline-specific vocabulary and skills, notably that of visual analysis, to describe and analyze visual and other forms of evidence contained within artworks and related forms of material culture. | x | x |  |
| 2. Students use appropriate research tools and skills to identify, access, and evaluate secondary and primary sources relevant to their objects of study. | x |  | x |
| 3. Students communicate effectively both orally and in writing about their art historical objects of study. |  | x |  |
| 4. Students situate their objects of study (whether artists, movements, artworks, or other elements of visual or material culture) in specific historical contexts, but are also able to relate them to one another using broader thematic concerns, historical shifts, and cultural connections. | x |  | x |
| 5. Students employ discipline-specific skills—whether in visual analysis or historical research—and knowledge of broader historical periods and artistic and cultural trends and practices to analyze and interpret unfamiliar objects of study. | x |  | x |
| 6. Students combine close analyses of physical/formal properties, historical/contextual analysis, and broader theoretical or thematic frameworks in support of strong, argument-driven interpretations of their objects of study. | x | x | x |
| 7. Students recognize and evaluate new and established theoretical and methodological approaches employed in art history, and are able to apply them to new objects of study and/or use them to develop their own approach to art history. | x |  | x |
| 8. Students develop and conduct original research projects in dialogue with existing scholarship.  | x | x | x |
| 9. Students engage in activities, whether public-facing assignments, internships, or scholarly conferences, in which they apply their learning to professional settings and situations. | x | x |  |
| 10. Students are exposed to diverse perspectives on artworks and other forms of material culture, whether through coursework in other disciplines, coursework with a global focus, or study at other institutions and/or abroad. | x |  | x |

# Measures to track student progress:

Beginning and continuing students in courses are evaluated on the basis of short-answer exams in which they define, respond to, and/or apply vocabulary, primary text passages, and unknown artworks and artifacts, short written responses to assigned texts, short papers, term papers, oral presentations, and participation in class discussions and activities. This combination of evaluative tools allows each student to gain a picture of their progress in acquiring both the vocabulary and skills of art history and the scholarly approaches used by the field. Evaluative comments are summarized at the end of each semester in a narrative course evaluation. The art history faculty review all aspects of a student’s work in the fifth term before students declare Art History as their area of concentration, and again when they submit a Thesis Prospectus in their sixth term.

# Specific measures to demonstrate each graduate’s competencies:

All students with a concentration in art history complete a senior thesis or project under the direct supervision of a member of the art history faculty. Each senior thesis or project in art history involves significant research and writing, and the student must defend their work in a public oral baccalaureate exam. Senior theses and projects are evaluated according to the comprehensiveness of the research, the strength and originality of the interpretation, and the clarity of the writing. Performance on the oral exam is evaluated based on how well the student responds to questions, demonstrates knowledge of the field, and defends their own interpretation of their object(s) of study.

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| **Academic Activities Corresponding to Outcomes** | **Outcomes Addressed** |
| Coursework grounded in the study of specific time periods and distributed to provide some chronological breadth (at a minimum, one course situated in each of the premodern, early modern, modern, and contemporary periods). | 1-6 |
| Coursework with a thematic focus. | 1-4 |
| Coursework with a global focus. | 1, 5, 10 |
| Coursework with a studio art focus. | 1, 6, 10 |
| An internship relevant to art history. | 9-10 |
| A theory and method course that introduces students to a variety of critical frameworks central to art history. | 1-8, 10 |
| Study of at least one foreign language pertinent to the student's area of focus (unless it is considered in the student's best interest to pursue alternative activities rather than foreign language study). | 2, 10 |
| Travel abroad and off-campus study are highly recommended. | 10 |
| A senior thesis or project in the field. | 1-4, 6-8 |

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