

ART DEPARTMENT 2022 ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Program Learning Outcome #3: Graduates will develop a personal, working theory of art with respect to Christian values and commitments.

I. INTRODUCTION

We undertook direct assessment in four courses and indirect assessment in one course during the 2021-2022 school year. The assessments involved specific assignments that align with PLO #3: Theorizing. The rubric targeted how effectively students could articulate a theory of art and explain how it relates to their Christian values and commitments.

The following chart displays which classes were used, and how.

	I/D	M
Lower Division	Art 10 & 15	
Upper Division		Art 131
		Art 195

I = Introduce, D = Develop, M = Master

NOTE: We were unable to assess art history students this year. We had one AH major in Art 131 who was absent the day we did the worksheet and survey. Our other AH major took Art 131 last year.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: We had at least two senior art majors this year who do not currently identify as Christian.

II. ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Art 10: All studio and art history students take 2-D Design. Art 10 is also a popular GE class. This spring, we had only 2 studio majors in Art 10. The rest of the students were mostly first or second-year students taking it for their “working artistically” GE.

Prompt:

Mapping: The initial brainstorming for this assignment should be completed in your sketchbook. This project is meant to externalize all kinds of things you've unconsciously absorbed so you can notice, appreciate, and perhaps adjust your networks of visual influence. It might be helpful to think about this project as a kind of artistic "family tree." The final piece should be created on bristol board using a variety of materials.

Categories:

- *Significant Place (a significant place, where were you born, where you grew up)*

- *Memorable Event (first experience making something with your hands, encountering something significant while traveling, a memorable concert or work of art that awed you, a meaningful film, family members, mentors, or teachers who impacted you)*
- *Color (favorite color, cultural influence of color, color story)*
- *Spiritual/Religious (does art making instill certain virtues, does art making engage different elements of your faith)*

Art 15: All studio and art history students take Drawing I. Art 15 is also a popular GE class. This spring, we had only 4 first- or second-year art majors in Art 15. The rest of the students were juniors or seniors taking it for their “working artistically” GE.

Students wrote a 1-2 page reflection paper responding to the following questions: *How might the act of observing and drawing bring you closer to your deepest held beliefs? Think a bit about your body as you are drawing, how does the embodied movement of drawing (and translation of what you see through your eyes, mind, and hand) change your sense of self in relation to what you are seeing. Which if any of the activities and/or projects that we've done in this class invited you to think about your own spiritual journey?*

Art 131: All studio and art history students take Theory and Criticism in the Arts. *Students completed a before/after worksheet in class. It asks them to compare their thinking at the beginning of the semester (captured in another in-class assignment from week 3) to their thinking at the end of the semester.*

Students also completed a brief survey at the end of Art 131, asking for their perception of their progress toward our departmental PLOs.

Art 195: Studio majors take the Senior Project/Senior Seminar sequence during their senior year. Students were asked to write short essays responding to the following prompt: *Over your four years at Westmont, we hope you have been led to consider your unique relationship between your art and your faith. With that in mind, we'd like to hear from you as to your thoughts on what integration of faith and learning with your art studies has meant to you. Has this relationship/integration evolved over the years? Are there any connections or threads in your current work?*

III. A. LOWER DIVISION RESULTS (Introduce/Develop)

Art 10: Direct Assessment—An Artistic “Family Tree”

The class as a whole:

	HD	D	E	NP
All (18)	0	0	61%	39%
Art (2)	0	0	100%	0
Non Art (16)	0	0	56%	44%

The professor's assessment was that the results of this exercise as whole looked "quite dismal," speculating that as the last exercise of the semester, done alongside the completion of their final projects, it may have gotten scanty attention. While students paid decent attention to "significant place" (the first category to address), they seem to have run out of steam soon after that.

Nonetheless, we can observe that our two (first year) art majors made it into the "emerging" category. Which is at least on a par with the other students who took the class for GE credit.

Art 15: Direct Assessment—Drawing as Embodied Prayer and Presence

The class as a whole (2 sections)

	HD	D	E	NP
20 total	55%	20%	15%	10%
(8) Seniors	63%		38%	
(7) Juniors	71%	14%		14%
(2) Sophomores	50%	50%		
(3) first years		67%		33%

Art majors (4) vs. non-art majors (16) *Our 3 art majors included 3 first years, 1 sophomore

	HD	D	E	NP
Art majors (4 students)	25%	50%		25%
Non-Art (16 students)	63%	13%	19%	6%

Considering *all* the students in the class, **75% scored in the "highly developed" or "developed" category**. This meets our arbitrarily chosen 75% benchmark.

Separating the art majors from the non-art majors, two additional trends emerge: 76% of non-art majors score in the HD/D categories. **75% of art majors land in the HD/D categories**. We note, however, that our art majors take this class in their first or second year of college. Most other students in this class this year, were juniors or seniors taking it as a GE. They have the advantage of additional years of their Westmont formation and additional maturity. This is reflected in their overall very strong responses. We could extrapolate that with respect to this PLO, our art majors benefit from the model provided by the older students in the class.

In both cases, however, with respect to this assessment, art majors and non-art majors alike met our benchmark of 75%.

III. B. UPPER DIVISION RESULTS (Master)

Art 131: Direct Assessment—Before and After Worksheet

The worksheet asked students to lay out the elements of what makes art "art" and what distinguishes good art from bad, or non-art. It also asked them to outline how they connect this understanding of art to their Christian convictions.

Defining art/good art:

All Students	HD	D	E	NP
20	4	7	7	2
	20%	35%	35%	10%

Art students	HD	D	E	NP
13	4	3	5	1
	31%	23%	38%	8%
Non-Studio	HD	D	E	NP
7	0	4	2	1
	0%	57%	29%	14%

Connecting art & faith

All Students	HD	D	E	NP
20	3	5	9	3
	15%	25%	45%	15%

Art Students	HD	D	E	NP
13	3	2	6	2
	23%	15%	46%	15%

Non-Studio	HD	D	E	NP
7		3	3	1
		43%	43%	14%

Though useful as a general “consolidator” of student experience at the end of the semester, and stimulus for class discussion, for the purpose of this assessment, the usual worksheet was not specific enough. While students *testified* to having learned a lot, their responses often lacked detail: e.g. they wrote things like “I have much better ways of making these connections now than I did at the beginning of the semester” rather than something specific like, “Tolstoy’s idea of Christian art helped me flesh out my own convictions regarding the importance of an emotional connection between artist and viewer.” As such, while **54% of our studio majors wrote up a cogent theory of art**; only **38% did a detailed job of connecting that to their faith**. These numbers are well below our benchmark of 75%.

Art 131: Indirect Assessment—Exit Survey

In addition to the worksheet, Professor DeBoer also surveys the class every year on their perception of their mastery of the PLOs supported by the course. Below are the results from the art and art history students’ responses to PLO #3, where 1 = “not at all” and 5 = “to a great extent.”

Theorizing Score	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Sample = 14	0	0	1	6.5	6.5	4.39
% responses	0	0	7%	46.4%	46.4%	

Faith/Art Score	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Sample = 14	0	0	3	4	7	4.29
% responses	0	0	21%	29%	50%	

Survey responses indicate a **high student perception (93% and 79%) of having made progress on the relevant PLOs**, much higher than our direct assessment indicates.

Art 195 Senior Seminar Reflection Essays

Plotting responses on our rubric, **75% of the essays were “developed” or “highly developed.”**

Sample	HD	D	E	NP
12	4	5	2	1
	33%	42%	17%	8%

Though we initially chose the 75th percentile arbitrarily, as a starting benchmark for all our PLOs, for this assessment, with some qualification due to the need to fine-tune some assignments, it seems that is a reasonable benchmark.

IV. DISCUSSION

We note that this is the most challenging of our PLOs to assess. Somewhat like the CUPA assessment she spearheaded for the entire institution back in 2018-2019, getting granular detail on students’ growth as faithful artists can be elusive. Nonetheless, our efforts this year can sharpen our approach to this important PLO.

Lower Division Courses:

We introduce ideas about art and faith and theory in lower division courses taken by all studio and art history students. The results of our assessments in Art 10 and Art 15 attest that students are at the beginning of a journey. While it appears to come somewhat naturally to them to connect their experiences of making art to various spiritual experiences (Art 15), asking them to think about the origins of the assumptions about faith and art they bring into the classroom with them was more challenging (Art 10). We can certainly tweak and sharpen these assignments (and their timing) in future. But what’s more important is that we see results in our seniors.

Upper Division Courses:

Art 131: Exit Survey & Before and After Worksheets

In the Art 131 exit survey, 93% of our majors attested to having made a lot of progress on coming to their own theory of art, and 79% attested to having made a lot of progress in making connections between their art and their faith (or deepest convictions, for our two non-professing majors).

The more objective assessment, taken from the “Before and After” worksheets, was less impressive. As we noted above, because the responses were often enthusiastic but lacking in specificity, Professor DeBoer gave lower scores. Only 54% of our majors wrote with enough detail to convince Professor DeBoer they had a cogent theory of art, and only 38% wrote in such a way as to convince her they could truly articulate the connections between their faith and their theory. These results don’t necessarily mean that students *didn’t* leave the class with a clear theory and ways of connecting that to their faith—only that the prompt wasn’t worded in such a way as to elicit the specificity we’d anticipated.

Comparing our art majors to the non-art majors in the class, non-art majors overall scored slightly better in both categories (in “theorizing” 57% for non-art majors/54% for art majors; in the “faith” category, 43% of non-art majors/ 38% for art majors). That’s not entirely surprising as the other majors in the class will include a number of cross-listed philosophy students who tend to be among our strongest students and are accustomed to providing evidence for their statements.

In future, we’ll get more informative results with a take-home assignment that asks for more specifics. Professor DeBoer has already rewritten the worksheet to encourage more detailed responses.

Art 195: Senior Seminar Reflections

Though Senior Seminar has an instructor of record, some of the assessment is done by all of the art faculty. Final grades, for example, include all art faculty’s assessment of each student’s senior project and their artist statement. This year, though Scott ultimately graded their senior reflections, we all read and discussed them as a department for the purposes of this assessment.

We noted relevant themes, including artistic talent as a gift from God, creativity as a reflection of the *imago dei*, the content of “Christian art” compared to “art made by Christians,” creation as general revelation; quality as a reflection of Christian commitment, how making art develops virtues, making art as an act of worship, and gratitude for their time in the art department.

Highly developed responses tied together multiple concepts in a discussion of faith and its relationship to art-making. **Developed** responses discussed relevant concepts, but they were less integrated in their articulation. **Emerging** responses made one or two general connections. Plotting responses on our rubric, 33% of our senior studio majors demonstrated “highly developed” thinking; 42% “Developed”; 17% “Emerging”; 8% “Not Present”.

Combined, **75% of the essays were “developed” or “highly developed.”** We somewhat arbitrarily set our initial benchmark for all PLOs at 75%. For this assessment, it seems that is a reasonable benchmark.

At our 4-12-22 department meeting, we discussed what we read, and thought about what we could learn from it. We noted the following range of themes as well as their frequency:

- 75% of the essays discussed the relationship between subject matter and faith, narrating how their view of what “Christian art” was expanded **beyond overt Christian content**. Students described how they now see “doing good work well” (a phrase Professor Anderson uses in class), or producing “**thoughtful, high-quality work,**” or “**working in good faith**” as a manifestation of Christian commitment.
- 58% of the essays **grounded artistic creativity in the *imago dei*** and as a **God-given gift**.
- 58% of the essays expressed having **resolved significant tensions** in their understanding of “Christian Art.” In some essays, the tension stemmed from the “subject matter”

questions outlined above—leaving behind their assumptions that “Christian Art” was necessarily cliché-ridden, cheesy, and poor quality. In others the tension came from family, friends, schools or churches that discouraged their artistic gifts. The discovery of broader ways of imagining “Christian” art, and of finding a biblical/theological justification for art were narrated as **liberating and empowering** discoveries.

- 58% of the essays included **direct expressions of gratitude** for the validation, freedom, guidance and modeling they experienced in the art department, particularly around faith integration. Those that didn’t express gratitude were not bitter or disaffected. They simply didn’t include appreciation in their remarks.
- 42% of the students narrated how the relationship between **content, process, and quality had become more holistic** for them during their years in the department, or that they are working toward more integration. For some of these students, **nature** was the key link: nature as part of God’s revelation, or a concern for environmental stewardship united content and Christian commitment.
- 42% of the essays discussed how art-making instills certain **virtues**: patience, diligence, attentiveness.
- 25% of the essays were sparse. We know these students, so we have a good sense for why the verbal expression was thin or hesitant, or why there was reluctance to even engage the question.
- 17% discussed how different **modes of production** (noodling vs. goal-driven) engaged different elements of their faith--prayer-like, meditative exploration, or intentional messaging.
- 17% mentioned working through **challenges** as part of their artistic and spiritual growth.

In our conversation, we were **pleased by the authentic voice** we heard in each essay. All the statements—even the sparse ones—read as natural and unforced. Each was unique. We are not producing cookie-cutter approaches to the task. We were particularly gratified to read so many versions of “I came in with a compartmentalized view of art’s relationship to my faith, but now have an integrated approach.” We **did not expect so much commentary on subject matter** or “Christian content.” Perhaps for us faculty, that issue rests in the dim mists of our own past journeys. We also **did not expect to read so much about students’ struggle to find validation** for their talents and interests. These are good reminders of how issues that have been long settled for faculty are still pressing for our students.

Lastly, we wished students had been more specific about what classes, what assignments, or what experiences had fostered their growth. Some students did include this information: Westmont in San Francisco, a book by artist Mako Fujimura, and Instagram were all mentioned once. Students named specific faculty. One student named “all my studio classes” and “my art history classes.” 2-D, 4-D were each mentioned once; Theory & Crit was mentioned twice. We realized the prompt didn’t specifically ask for classes, or assignments, or experiences that had been formative, so we added that to the prompt for future use.

V. CONCLUSIONS

We concluded this assessment at our September 26 department meeting, noting that our “Theorizing” assessment provided us with a number of insights.

- “Theorizing” is our most sophisticated PLO. It requires more higher-order learning skills (analysis, creative, personal synthesis) than our other PLOs. These skills are acquired and honed not just in the art department, but in a student’s overall Westmont experience. So we are not surprised to see, in mixed GE courses (Art 10 and Art 15) lower results for our first and second year art majors in comparison to their junior and senior peers students.
- Our seniors’ results do show progress over time. The high, subjective achievement (93%) from the Art 131 indirect assessment (the exit survey) supports the level of achievement we saw in students’ senior reflections, where student met our 75% benchmark. We discussed possibly lowering the benchmark, in light of the results of the direct assessment in Art 131, but then decided to hold to 75% for now, and aim at improving our assessment tools.
- We are agreed that the next time we do this assessment, we’ll use sharper instruments. We can get more information about student learning with targeted assignments that are more tightly worded and carry some weight towards students’ final grades. It’s not that we learned little from this round; but that we’ve seen how we could learn even more, in spite of the challenges inherent in this PLO.

Class: _____ studio students
 _____ art history student

Evaluation chart for PLO #3:

Graduates will develop a personal, working theory of art with respect to Christian values and commitments.

Studio	Highly developed	Developed	Emerging	Not Present
The student can articulate a theory of art HD = D = E = NP =	The student articulates a cogent theory of art, and accurately positions their theory with respect to major themes and thinkers in the realm of aesthetics and criticism	The student articulates a cogent theory of art, informed by (but not explicitly discussed in terms of) major themes and thinkers in aesthetics and criticism.	The student names some their core commitments, but they are not necessarily consistent with one another, or cogently worked out.	The student offers some general thoughts about what constitutes art and distinguishes good from bad.
The student can articulate a Christian (or moral/ethical) grounding for elements of their theory. HD = D = E = NP =	The student situates their theory of art within a robustly articulated biblical or theological framework	The student grounds their theory in relevant biblical or theological concepts	The student draws one or two connections between their thoughts on art and their faith.	The student makes no connections between their thoughts on art and their faith
Art History	Highly developed	Developed	Emerging	Not Present
The student can articulate a theory of art	The student articulates a cogent theory of art, and accurately positions their theory with respect to major themes and thinkers in the realm of aesthetics and criticism	The student articulates a cogent theory of art, informed by (but not explicitly discussed in terms of) major themes and thinkers in aesthetics and criticism.	The student names some their core commitments, but they are not necessarily consistent with one another, or cogently worked out.	The student offers some general thoughts about what constitutes art and distinguishes good from bad.
The student can articulate a Christian (or moral/ethical) grounding for elements of their theory.	The student situates their theory of art within a robustly articulated biblical or theological framework	The student grounds their theory in relevant biblical or theological concepts	The student draws one or two connections between their thoughts on art and their faith.	The student makes no connections between their thoughts on art and their faith

