

Reflective Essay Component of the Senior Thesis Exhibition

Guidelines for Senior Art Majors

The capstone experience for the studio art major is the Senior Thesis Exhibition (STE). For the exhibition each senior major selects and presents a body of work representing the culmination of study in the studio arts. Effective with the class of 2012, the department has added a complementary writing requirement to the STE and thus to the major: a short essay.

The process of formulating the essay will encourage you to reflect upon your experiences and growth as a studio art major and provide a means for you to think seriously and communicate effectively about your own artwork as you prepare for your exhibition. The essay will also be used, by the department in coordination with the exhibition of work, as a tool for evaluating the senior capstone experience.

Content. Artists' writings cover a wide range of styles and intents including a cryptic stream of consciousness, a politically charged manifesto, a delicate poem, a humble statement of intent or a scholarly essay. In art, writing may be highly structured—as in a theoretical paper—or much more informal. Members of the art department agree that the reflective essay is seen as a culmination of the writing experience in the major and may take many forms. Throughout the studio art major you may write statements of intent, critical evaluations, analytical papers, response papers, journals and/or descriptive or expressive essays. Because there is no standard convention of writing within the arts, you may explore a broad variety of writing in context to your work, including, but not limited to the following examples:

An artist statement explains, justifies, and contextualizes your work. Artists often maintain and revise these statements throughout their career and may be required to submit the statement to apply for graduate school, residencies, exhibitions, or grants. An artist statement is not a biography but might include biographical information pertinent to the concept/process of the work.

A self-reflective essay critically analyzes the experiences of why and how:

- a. your choice of classes or faculty has influenced or impacted your artwork.
- b. your ideas may have changed over the course of four years due to exposure to new tools, mediums or ideas.
- c. the influence of art historical perspectives, information and ideas are manifested in your work.

A process essay may focus on the tools, processes and/or techniques you have chosen and the impact those choices have had on the your work.

It is expected that you will write a paper that is well crafted, concise, clear, consistent in style and grammatically correct. The Writing Center is available to you for help with these issues and you are encouraged to take advantage of this service.

Length. The essay should be 100 to 1000 words on one or two sheets of 8.5 x 11 inch paper, typed, and in 12 pt. legible type. This format requires that you be concise with your thoughts and words. (for example, this document is approx. 1200 words.)

Timeline. During the first senior meeting in the FALL the faculty will present and discuss the reflective essay component of the capstone experience. ***Within the two weeks following the meeting you must confer with a potential faculty mentor for the essay.*** Essay Mentor Forms will be available at the fall meeting and must be returned to the art office with the faculty member's signature (*by the date specified at the meeting*). **Faculty are advised to work with no more than five seniors each year.** The faculty member's primary role is to help you with content and effectiveness. Meetings between you and your mentor will be dictated by individual progress and requirements. The department recommends that outlines are completed by the end of the fall

semester and first drafts are completed by March 1. A final draft is due to the faculty mentor for assessment by mid-April. Please make use of the Writing Center for help with structure and grammar. Final essays are due to the art department office on the same day that information for labels is due. (*this date will be announced at a senior seminar meeting and posted on the website*).

Grading. A single grade of pass/fail will be assigned for both the essay and the exhibition since the STE is a noncredit bearing requirement for graduation. Essays will be read and evaluated by the faculty mentor. Any essay considered failing would be discussed with you in time to rework and improve it. If you are unsuccessful, the mentor will notify the department Chair by May 1. All Pass/Fail essay grades will be documented during the grading of the Senior Thesis Exhibition. Some essays may be discussed at the grading of the STE.

START YOUR ESSAY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. As you make your work take notes, write outlines, do research, and keep a journal. Allow yourself time to develop, alter and correct your writing as your work changes and progresses. Your Faculty Essay Mentor will advise on content. Mechanical/structural problems should be discussed with the Writing Center.

Consider the following rubric as you work:

FOCUS, PURPOSE, THESIS - The essay should contain:

- a major, easily identifiable and sophisticated idea that relates to your art
- in-depth understanding and thoughtful, unique explorations of the topic
- inventive, original content that is colorfully and thoroughly articulated
- a strong voice which demonstrates a full understanding of your ideas and how they are essential to your art work
- evidence of research that is integral with the student's own interests

A problematic essay might be confusing in its major ideas, lack insight, clarity or originality. Ideas may be general, not explored to full potential or predictable. There may be a simplistic view of the topic, be difficult to understand and lack effort or comprehension.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION of the essay should:

- be evident, understandable and appropriate for the thesis
- set up an introduction and bring thoughts to a conclusion
- move logically from idea to idea and point to point

A problematic essay might have passages that are unclear or lacking insight. There might be too much or too little information. The structure may wander, jump around or be non-existent.

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT of the essay should:

- use examples to support ideas without factual errors
- clearly synthesize knowledge from other fields into studio practice
- carefully document ideas and quotations

A problematic essay might only refer to sources common to studio arts and use weak or too few examples. Documentation of ideas and quotations may be lacking or only occasional. There may be no references or examples to support opinions and ideas.

MECHANICS AND PRESENTATION of the essay should:

- use appropriate and sophisticated vocabulary and terminology
- have correct grammar, sentence structure and punctuation
- show evidence of editing and proofreading and formatting
- use active voice where possible

A problematic essay might use limited and inappropriate vocabulary. There may be errors in grammar, spelling or punctuation. There may be run-on sentences.