

Excerpt from Standard Four Appraisal: MassArt 2017 NEASC and NASAD Self-Study

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Student learning at MassArt most often manifests through making. Making in art and design occurs within a culture of achievement where the whole of a project or experience is paramount. Sometimes, when appropriate, parts are assessed as evidence of the quality of the whole. However, and more often, works must be understood not as evidence-based measurements but rather as complicated systems of goals, intents, purposes, techniques, materials, and craft. When faculty engage with students and their works, assessments must depend upon a depth and breadth of experience and expertise in dialog with the individual student aspirations, skills, and development. The critique and portfolio review reside at the center of this process of discernment, guidance, and judgment. This dialogic means of co-determining an assessment considers many elements holistically. It examines many perspectives (from other students, faculty, and professionals) and engages in extended questioning to develop a more unified perspective. The ultimate aim is helping students achieve the goals, standards, and intentions of their pursuits within a discipline or across disciplines.

The complexity and simultaneity of these goals resist clarity and specificity in written form. Nonetheless, faculty continue the struggle to codify these goals through a constant process of curriculum appraisal. They understand the need to communicate to students the essences of their education in art and design, and to an outside audience that the goals of an education in art and design are real and substantial. Technical skills must be learned along with attitudinal dispositions. Conceptual development must be learned along with craft and aesthetics. Individual purpose and drive must be learned within cultural and social contexts. Student development in these areas does not progress linearly nor in isolation. Our systems of assessment must account for this.

The synthesis of these goals has given rise to the specific methods for measuring achievement of the degree requirements. Besides ongoing and systematic critiques and reviews, these methods include self-evaluations; juried and/or public exhibitions (internal and external); public and peer criticism; criticism from other artists, designers, and professionals; and quizzes, exams, writings, presentations, and project evaluations. At all points along the way, these forms create an intersubjective reality. In attending to the myriad goals, purposes, forms, and perspectives, the result of the making takes on vivid and essential meanings, creating a clear understanding of how and what students are learning. Faculty then synthesize these understandings to appraise the assumptions, structures, and conditions of the curricula.