PROPOSAL FOR AN ART THEORY & PRACTICE MINOR
Spring 2018

Rationale for the Minor

The over-riding reason to institute a minor in Art Theory & Practice (ATP) is high student demand. With the more interdisciplinary and socially engaged artists we've added to our faculty over the last 10 years, and with the new courses they've introduced to our curriculum, ATP now bears much more direct relevance to students from other departments across the campus. Our emphasis on novel ways of applying critical thinking and creative agency make us an outstanding complement to many other areas of study including Art History, Gender Studies, Performance Studies and Journalism (all areas from which we currently draw a lot of our students). In addition, students in McCormick and the Segal Institute as well as in Radio TV Film can have their main focus of work and research be addressed specifically but from a fresh perspective in our classes.

Because of this, a growing number of Northwestern undergraduates want to obtain a degree in ATP. But they simply do not have the time to add our major to their other majors and minors primarily for these three reasons:

- Students often cannot get into our high-demand introductory classes until their sophomore or junior years.
- It is quite challenging for undergraduates — who typically have other major/minor affiliations — to fit our six-hours-per-week studio classes into their schedules.
- Our classes are quite different from what many students expect or have previously experienced. Often, it is only after taking one or two ATP classes that students realize they want and need more.

Offering a minor would open the department up to them.

Six Classes Required for a Minor in Art Theory & Practice

Students completing a minor in ATP will likely not have anything approaching the familiarity with what it is to be a maker of contemporary art that we hope our majors will have. Instead the minor will serve as a complement to other the students' other areas of study. For this reason we've attempted to leave relatively open-ended our proposed requirements:

- **Two 200-level introductory courses to be agreed upon in consultation with ATP's director of undergraduate studies.** Our five introductory courses (in drawing, painting, time-based art, sculpture and photography) instruct students in foundational skills particular to a wide array of mediums and techniques. Our DUS will help students to select those introductory courses that best complement their work outside of ATP.

- **Either ART 260 Studio Practice or ART 270 Contemporary Art Survey or ART 272 Critical Methods for Contemporary Art.** ART 260 emphasizes practice as the material basis of an
artist's creative activity; ART 270 is a slide-lecture course designed to introduce students to the myriad forms and concerns of art over the last half century; and ART 272 lays out the basic keywords, concepts and analytical categories of theoretical discourses relevant to an informed and critical engagement with contemporary art. The focus of these classes are individual artists whose self-directed practices can be evaluated formally, theoretically and historically.

- Three additional courses at the 300 level. These studio/seminar classes encourage in-depth research and production related to topics of particular relevance to present-day culture.

Learning Goals and Assessments

The goal of an undergraduate minor in Art Theory and Practice is to prepare students to contribute forcefully to contemporary culture, whether as artists, designers, engineers, or any of the other vocations that require creative thinking. We focus on the reception and interpretation of artworks, their presentation and distribution, but — most of all — their production. Our students consider current issues alongside historical traditions, interpretation and analysis alongside technical skills, and theory tandem to practice. Students experiment with a wide range of creative strategies, becoming familiar with diverse practical and theoretical perspectives and discourses.

Students acquire skills in:
- Visual analysis
- Creative problem solving
- Technical abilities
- Critical and creative thinking

Through the completion of the minor, students learn to:
- Effectively convey thoughts, affects, ideas and questions in artistic form.
- Develop the ability to interpret and articulate the often multiple meanings that are conveyed through artworks, and parse out the mechanisms through which these meanings are conveyed.
- Locate contemporary art practices within historical contexts and lineages, and use these shared histories as tools in the making of artworks.
- Employ multiple theoretical frameworks that draw on a variety of other disciplines in STEM, Communications and the Humanities.
- Identify and creatively solve problems within a variety of physical, technological, social and cultural contexts.
- Establish a independently-motivated and self-directed practice.
When it comes to the assessment of student learning, both process and outcome are taken into consideration. Course projects are evaluated based on the amount of ambition, experimentation, curiosity, integration of skills, and intentionality that the student demonstrates. Over the duration of each class improvement is measured in terms of the student’s commitment to those ideas and approaches the instructor demonstrates and discusses. In group critiques students are expected to articulately analyze artworks by drawing on theoretical concepts and historical examples.

As we do with our majors, each ATP minor will meet individually with the department chair and/or DUS to discuss her or his progress several times a year until graduation.