INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDE FOR ART HISTORY MAJORS

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Note: This guide supplements but does not supplant the College's I.S. Guide, with which each art history major is expected to be familiar.

I. PREPARATION FOR THE SENIOR I.S.

Senior I.S. will be the biggest project you'll undertake at Wooster. It is the culmination of the efforts you've made during your college experience to think critically and independently, and to express yourself effectively. It is imperative not to underestimate the amount of time and preparation senior I.S. requires.

Students often encounter trouble with senior I.S. because they have not adequately thought out what they want to do, or understood what is possible to do. First, you need to have a clear conception of what a thesis is.

A thesis is a proposition sustained by argument and supported by research and documentation. An argument is your reasoned perspective on the main subject of your paper, supported by logic and evidence, all presented fairly. The main argument of a book or article is also called its "thesis." The senior I.S. is indeed a thesis rather than a general report or a record of your own personal interest in a topic.

Begin to select your senior thesis topic by establishing a restricted problem that can be substantively treated in 65-75 pages. Put the problem in the form of a question if possible. Do not let the apparent narrowness of the question bother you. It is important to remember that you are not writing a PhD dissertation or a monograph on an artist. Moreover, the original question will become bigger as you work; nuances, contradictions and complexities will emerge.

When formulating your thesis, remember that you have a limited amount of time and resources. Ask yourself questions like: can I adequately explore this question in two semesters? What proportion of my sources can be obtained at Wooster or through interlibrary loan? Will I be able to travel to larger libraries when important sources aren't accessible? THE ONLY WAY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS IS TO HAVE DONE PRELIMINARY READING ON YOUR TOPIC.

This preliminary reading should begin in the spring semester and summer following the junior I.S. Reading broadly within any given area of inquiry will allow you to discern its issues and unsolved problems. Such preparatory work

will enable you to state your thesis clearly at the first fall conference of art history seniors and faculty members. A firm grasp of what you want to do will also eliminate the impulse to change topics that so often prevents seniors from getting off to a good start with their I.S. research.

Think about what your relationship is to your thesis. This is a difficult problem, even for mature scholars. Professionals as well as students often make the mistake of putting themselves in an extreme position with respect to their material. They become mere collectors of information or tellers of tales, self-righteous egos who belittle the efforts of past scholars, or non-egos who fail to really interpret their material. Try to strike a balance between a responsible attention to facts and to earlier scholarship, and a creative interpretation which only your mind and experience could produce. Your I.S. should not be a litany of past scholarship; neither should it be a diary of your personal thoughts about your material. You want to reflect what you've learned, but project something new.

Here are some examples of some thesis topics that are not viable, and suggestions for how they might be changed into something manageable. Note that the titles are clear, concise, and give the reader some idea of what to expect:

1. Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Art (too broad, too much to deal with, no suggestion of what the thesis is)

   BUT

   Naturalism and Misogyny in Degas' Brothel Monotypes (establishes a question and treats a restricted range of works)

2. The Child in Art (hopelessly broad topic with no thesis)

   BUT

   Female Virtues in Pieter de Hooch's Images of Maternal Care (limited to one artist but still allows you incorporate the broad cultural context)

3. Picasso's Guernica (too much scholarship is available, and there is no "avenue" into it--no organizing principle)

   BUT

   The Meaning of the Bull in Picasso's Guernica (provides a way of dealing with the vast Picasso literature and is a controversial problem)

II. RESEARCHING AND WRITING YOUR SENIOR I.S.

A. Bibliography

One of the most common problems in art history I.S.'s is the inability or unwillingness of students to conduct thorough bibliographic searches, and to balance the kinds of sources they use. You should begin building your bibliography as soon as you begin developing your thesis, and you should be continuously alert to the variety and quality of materials you utilize. The World Wide Web, for instance, can be an excellent resource for basic research (for example, museum sites), but internet sources vary tremendously in scholarly content and should be used with great caution and restraint.

A basic first step in building a bibliography would be locating books in the CONSORT and OhioLINK databases.

A more comprehensive bibliography can be established using a number of resources. Work your way through bibliographies AND NOTES in monographs, exhibition catalogues and reference books like encyclopedias, which give good basic bibliographies up to a certain date. Periodical indexes are a very important resource. You should be familiar with the online art databases (such as Art Abstracts and BHA—Bibliography of the History of Art) that are available through the "Resources by Subject" link on the library's webpage. For those of you with modern topics, some OhioLINK institutions that you may be able to visit subscribe to Artbibliographies Modern. Also, don't forget that periodical indexes for non-art fields related to your topic (e.g. history, religious studies, women's studies, literature) may provide valuable material as well, and that these indexes are also accessible through computerized searches. Your adviser may also be aware of more specialized bibliographies in any given field, and a reference librarian can be enormously helpful as well.

When you use any periodical index, do not restrict yourself to checking under one term or name—check related entries as well. And don't dismiss periodical sources by title alone. Often, the title doesn't accurately reflect content, and even when an article seems only indirectly related to your topic, it may very well contain a gold mine of further bibliography in its notes.

Finally, two more advanced resources of which you should be aware. An extremely comprehensive database is WorldCat (FirstSearch), accessible through the Library's webpage (go to "Databases by Title" and click "W"). This database includes a wide array of publications on any given topic. Depending on your topic, your adviser may also suggest that you check Dissertation Abstracts International, an index of PhD dissertations available in microform or

photocopy, or online as "ProQuest Digital Dissertations," accessible through the library's webpage (go to "P" in the "Databases by Title" list).

As you attempt to prioritize your sources (what to look at first), remember that it is most efficient to work from recent sources back. This allows you to discern patterns in the scholarship in any given area of inquiry and to gauge the amount of material available. Old sources should not be discounted: work your way back through the literature as far as you can. Often, old articles are very informative, especially when seen in the light of more recent sources.

Accept that your bibliographic search will take you on some "wild-goose chases." It will be tedious, time-consuming, and sometimes disappointing. Nevertheless, it is absolutely necessary, and your patience and diligence will be rewarded.

It is a good idea to keep brief notes on what you derive from each source, especially if your adviser asks you for an annotated bibliography. This varies from adviser to adviser: some may want this in written form; others may want you to be able to discuss what your sources have to offer in tutorial sessions.

B. Methodology

As you begin formulating your thesis, be aware of the methodological approach or approaches you will use. Ask yourself what the most appropriate way to deal with your particular material would be.

How do you know what approaches are available? In your junior I.S. seminar, you were explicitly exposed to some of the basic methodologies. But the best way to get a sense of how you might proceed is to keep your mind alert on how <u>others</u> proceed. As you attend the lectures and do the readings for your regular art history courses, be conscious of how your teachers and other scholars arrive at interpretations of works of art and architecture. As you discuss your course material with your student-colleagues, be aware not just of content but of method.

Do not be too tied to one methodology at the expense of others that may counterbalance it or are essential to understanding the works you're treating. If you take a primarily iconographic approach and stop really looking at a work of art, then your interpretation will be as flawed as if you had restricted yourself to stylistic analysis alone. The same could be said about any interpretation that is methodologically exclusive. As you work, keep asking yourself if there is any other way you could view your material which might contribute to a fuller understanding of it.

C. The Works of Art or Architecture

Art history is distinct from many other disciplines in that it is rooted in physical objects: the actual art works or buildings. Some students become so immersed in background reading and theory that they do not determine which specific works they will treat until too late, and their I.S.'s lose that important, object-centered quality. Along with developing your basic thesis outline (see the schedule below), you need to develop your list of individual works to be discussed.

Research these works independently, apart from their place within your thesis. Know as much as you can about each painting, print, sculpture, drawing or building that you will discuss. Museum and exhibition catalogues are excellent resources for this kind of information. Before you presume to interpret any work, know as many facts about it as you can, beginning with its size, medium, function and physical context. Who commissioned it and/or owned it? Are its attribution and its title certain? Is there an accepted date for it? Is there a consensus about interpreting its meaning or place within the artist's or architect's oeuvre? Do we know what it originally looked like, or has it been restored or added to? Is it finished? Unless you can answer questions like these, you put yourself at considerable risk when you use a work to support a point in your argument.

D. Form

Form is all too often neglected by students writing their senior I.S.'s. Papers with much to offer conceptually and analytically are too often marred by a lack of attention to writing quality, correctness of documentation, and neat presentation. The art history faculty recognizes no excuse for poor form, and these considerations will figure in the grading of senior I.S.'s.

Since good writing depends upon clear, effective communication of ideas, your adviser's responses to your outlines and drafts are good indications of whether or not your writing needs work. Does he or she have a difficult time understanding what you mean? If so, you probably need to refine your writing further. Good academic writing is hard work: sometimes articles go through several rigorous edits before they reach the printed page. The more you can work on your writing before you submit it to your adviser, the better.

As a general guide to writing in art history, you may want to take a look at Writing about Art by Henry Sayre. The best guide to correct grammar and syntax and good writing style is still The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White. It is an exceptionally concise and straightforward book that anyone who writes can utilize frequently.

There are a number of standard manuals available for questions about documentation. In all cases, make sure you're consulting the latest editions to make sure you're not working with outdated systems. For example, no standard manual recommends the awkward and confusing terms op. cit. and loc. cit. anymore.

Here are three manuals commonly in use. The first one, used in junior I.S, is recommended by the art history faculty, but you may also want to look at the others just to get a sense of their differences. In all cases, check for the most recent editions.

1. Kate Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations. This is the best manual for your stage of scholarship. It is not so overwhelming as the Chicago Manual but gives more information than the MLA Handbook. Those of you who want to attend graduate school would benefit from an early familiarity with this book.

2. The Chicago Manual of Style is similar to Turabian but far more comprehensive. It offers answers or alternative solutions to most of the problems of documentation you might encounter. It is difficult to use, but well worth the effort.

3. MLA (Modern Language Association) Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations. A good, concise manual, but note the differences from Turabian, the manual we recommend.

The student of art history will soon discover that the problems of documentation in this field elude even the comprehensiveness of the Chicago Manual. For example, there is no standard way of citing an exhibition catalogue. The best advice we can give you here is to look at art historical publications. The standards of documentation in art history in the United States tend to be set by the Art Bulletin. Any recent issue is a good guide to accepted note and bibliographic form. Also, notice how figures are cited within Art Bulletin articles. Such citations, and the captions beneath the photographs, are good guides for dealing with the visual material accompanying your text.

In documenting your I.S. with notes and bibliography, keep two rules in mind: (1) whatever system you use should be accepted within the humanities (the social and physical sciences do things differently) and should be applied *consistently*; NEVER combine systems and (2) document wherever you think the reader might need to see substantiation of your argument or wherever you have taken an idea or fact that is not common knowledge from another source. Too

much documentation is better than too little. Do not assume that the reader can distinguish between your thoughts and those of others. Notes should be numbered consecutively (1, 2, 3, 4 etc.) for each chapter of your I.S. They may be footnotes, or endnotes, as you prefer. As endnotes, they are best placed at the back of the I.S., divided by Chapter headings.

It is important to stress that proper documentation is an ethical matter. Each art history major should be thoroughly familiar with the definition of plagiarism in The Scot's Key. Note that plagiarism does not refer simply to the verbatim copying of phrases, sentences or paragraphs from another source, but to the representing of another person's ideas as your own, without acknowledging your source. Paraphrasing does not remove obligation to make the paraphrased source known to the reader.

E. Illustrations

Another special problem presented by art-historical scholarship is the need to illustrate it. As with documentation, try to ask yourself when the reader will need to see an image in order to understand the point you are making. Students often erroneously assume that faculty know every work of art or architecture, but this is not possible. Even if it were, it is always a good idea to refresh one's visual memory of familiar works. Traditionally, illustrations have been grouped at the end of the I.S. (with a list in the front), although some students have chosen to insert them within each chapter (again, with a list at the front). Ideally, the copies of your I.S. that you submit to the faculty need to have good illustrations in the form of scanned images, color Xeroxes, or photographs. You are responsible for getting this done. See Marsha Bansberg, who supervises the Visual Resources Library, if you have questions about this.

F. Criteria for judging the quality of a senior I.S.

What goals should you have in mind when writing your I.S.? Faculty members are looking for some evidence of enthusiasm, curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity and awareness of the complexity of works of art and architecture as human productions and cultural documents. We also want to see that a student has command of his or her material and can speak authoritatively about it. Speaking with authority not only implies a certain level of knowledge about your I.S. topic, but also that you have moved beyond interpreting that knowledge in simplistic, black-and-white terms of right and wrong. The art history faculty also expect to read an I.S. which is sufficiently documented, well written, and correct in matters of form. A “good" or "honors" I.S. is the result of attentiveness to these qualities during the whole I.S. process. That process is outlined below.

III. PRINCIPLES AND SCHEDULE OF I.S. ADVISING

A. At the beginning of the fall semester, the majors and the faculty members will meet to discuss topics. Each student will be assigned an adviser after the faculty confer. The pairs are determined primarily by two considerations: (1) the compatibility of topics with faculty areas of expertise and (2) the balance of faculty I.S. loads.

B. The function of your adviser

Your faculty adviser is responsible for meeting with you on a regular basis (usually ***weekly***), and providing you with a continuing critical evaluation of your work. He or she will guide you in selecting and refining your thesis, establishing your methodology, organizing your text and improving your writing. He or she will set goals for each I.S. conference and provide a critical sounding board during the semester. Your adviser can offer you the benefit of his or her own research experience.

Your faculty adviser is not responsible for choosing a thesis for you (although he or she will actively evaluate your proposed topic), providing you with a bibliography, editing your paper line by line, or proofreading your paper. After the eighth week of the second semester of I.S., your adviser is not responsible for reading drafts or meeting with you. Consider spring break your time for putting finishing touches on your manuscript. Many faculty members are either out of town over spring break or must attend to research problems of their own.

Because the I.S. grade is arrived at by faculty consensus, the reading of any draft by your faculty adviser does not imply the ultimate acceptability of the I.S.

C. Maintaining a schedule with your adviser

It is very important to maintain a schedule during the I.S. advising process. One common problem is missed conferences. A missed meeting means that goals met will not be discussed and no new goals will be set. Because of the complexity of faculty schedules, missed I.S. conferences are often difficult to re-schedule. Should you have to miss a conference, it is only common courtesy to call your adviser well ahead of time.

Failure to maintain a schedule is one of the most common problems in I.S. It seems to be most damaging to students' analysis of works of art or architecture, which unfortunately tends to get put off because of their preoccupation with background reading and theoretical issues. This situation is especially

unfortunate, since art history is an object-centered discipline. Here is the schedule the art history faculty recommends:

First Semester

1. By the end of the fourth week: a concise statement of your thesis and how you intend to proceed, plus a preliminary bibliography, are due. Your adviser may ask to see your research materials at this point.

2. By the end of the eighth week: a rough outline and a list of the works of art or architecture you plan to discuss are due. Your adviser may need to see illustrations as well.

3. By the end of the fall semester: we strongly encourage you to have shown two complete, typed chapters to your adviser for comment and critique. ALL NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND VISUAL REFERENCES MUST BE INCLUDED.

Second Semester

Depending on the way your I.S. is structured, you and your adviser will establish a schedule for completing the remainder of your text. A good basic rule would be to complete one chapter every two to three weeks. By the beginning of the eighth week at the latest, a complete draft of your I.S. should be in your adviser's hands. THIS DRAFT MUST INCLUDE ALL NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND VISUAL REFERENCES.

I.S.'s are due at the Registrar's Office by 5:00 P.M. on the day classes resume after spring break. The College takes this deadline very seriously and so should you. Late I.S.'s will receive a grade of "Incomplete" which automatically reverts to "NC" (no credit) after two weeks, unless the Dean for Curriculum has given prior approval for an extension of the "I." In consultation with the adviser, the Dean will establish the conditions necessary to achieve a passing grade for a late I.S. No late I.S. will receive a grade of "H" without the unanimous vote of the faculty in the department.

Art history majors need to submit two bound copies. If at all economically feasible, these copies (used by the adviser and the reader in preparation for your oral) should contain good color scans or photographs. One of the good copies will ultimately be yours; the other will be filed with the department after mechanical errors are fixed.

Please note that unless your drafts are turned in to your adviser with full documentation and visual references, he or she has no way of judging the quality of your scholarship. Failure to do this often leads to problems in the I.S. oral that the student has not anticipated.

IV. THE ORAL I.S. EXAM

A. The nature of the oral exam

The grade for senior I.S. is not based solely upon your manuscript, but on how well you are able to defend your work at the oral exam. The oral generally centers on your I.S. thesis, but the faculty may ask questions to test your understanding of related ideas or more general art historical concepts.

Students often exaggerate the fearsomeness of the oral exam. It is generally very conversational and even enjoyable: an open exchange of views and a free flow of questions and answers. For your oral, you want to be confident and sure of your material. But you don't want to be defensive or arrogant: acknowledge problems you've encountered or issues that are still puzzling to you. Most of all, the faculty members will want to get a sense of your engagement with your material, and your command of your facts and your methodology. Think about what you have learned, how the I.S. has helped you grow, and what you might do differently if you could.

B. The procedure of critiquing the I.S. and the oral exam

In the week when classes resume after spring break, the faculty will divide the I.S.'s for critiquing and set up an oral exam schedule. Each I.S. will normally have one reader (not the adviser). The reader will write a critique for the student and the adviser. The oral exam will include the reader, the student and the adviser. In general, only the art history faculty is involved, but, upon occasion, members of the studio faculty or instructors from other departments might participate, depending upon the topic of the I.S.

The reader will give you your critique a day or more ahead of time. Read through it, and think about how you might answer objections or queries he or she raises. The critique generally forms the basis for the questions asked in the oral. The faculty may begin your exam by asking you to respond to an aspect of the critique that strikes you as particularly important.

The oral exam lasts between 45 minutes to an hour. At that point, you will leave and the faculty will deliberate. After their discussion, your adviser will confer with you in general about the faculty's evaluation of your written I.S. and your

performance in the oral. The precise grades will be determined after the faculty has had a chance to deliberate as a whole.

C. Grades

A grade of "Honors" indicates a clear excellence in content, method and form. A grade of "Good" indicates a significantly better-than-average performance in those three areas, or that a weakness in one area is compensated by strengths in others. A "Satisfactory" grade indicates that there is weakness in content, method or form, but that the I.S. satisfies departmental expectations for its senior majors. An "NC" designates that the I.S. is seriously deficient in one or more areas, and that the weaknesses are not compensated by strengths. If a student receives an "NC" on his or her I.S., he or she will be asked to re-enroll in 452.

D. The final step in the I.S. process is submitting a clean, proofread copy to the department. Subsequent art history students are able to look at past I.S.'s, so your paper should be in good form before it is deposited. The writer of the critique will indicate, either specifically or in more general terms, the kinds of mechanical errors (typos, for instance) the student needs to fix to produce this clean copy.

E. A bibliography of recommended handbooks follows, along with sample Title and Table of Contents pages. These samples are only to give you a basic idea—for further examples and alternatives, see the manuals and the past I.S.'s stored in the department 's main office (see Rose Seling or your adviser for assistance).

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THE MEANING OF THE BULL IN PICASSO'S GUERNICA

by

Georgia D. La Tour

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION: THE BULL IN SPANISH ART AND PICASSO'S OEUVRE 1

II. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF GUERNICA 17

III. THE EVOLUTION OF THE BULL IMAGE IN GUERNICA 34

IV. CONCLUSION: THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE BULL IN THE CONTEXT OF GUERNICA 48

APPENDICES. 54

NOTES. 60

BIBLIOGRAPHY 64

ILLUSTRATIONS 70