

Date: March 25, 2013

To: Nancy Brickhouse, Interim Provost
Sheldon Pollack, President, University Faculty Senate

From: Barbara Settles, Department of Individual and Family Studies *Barbara Settles*
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Subject: Permanent Status Review Report: Preservation Studies Doctoral Program

The PhD program in Preservation Studies was approved by the University Faculty Senate in 2005 and admitted its first students in 2006. The authors of this review believe that the program now merits permanent status.

I. Objectives, strengths, and weaknesses

The stated objective of the Preservation Studies Program (PSP) since its inception has been to “teach the philosophies, research methodologies, and policies informing preservation efforts focused on art, architecture, landscapes, and material culture.” The program attains this objective by harnessing intellectual and material resources from multiple units across the university. Admitting only one or two students each year, the program develops a tailored and coordinated course of study for each student in line with his or her interests, be these more on technical or cultural aspects of preservation. The expertise of core art conservation faculty and staff is thereby joined to the expertise of faculty (and sometimes analytical equipment) in departments such as Art History or Chemistry and Biochemistry, or university units such as the Winterthur Program or the Disaster Research Center. In turn, some of these departments or units already appear to have benefited from their association with students who have brought with them some expertise of their own. In the words of the chair of one department, the program “represents the best of the academy by promoting cross-disciplinary scholarship in ways that would not happen spontaneously.”

Despite the eclectic nature of the students’ courses of study, the program appears to maintain a collegial and collaborative atmosphere, for example by means of the non-credit seminar PRES 801. Students have helped to build the reputation of the program by presenting their work in national or international colloquia. Several students have also evidently taken note of the program’s encouragement to publish work while pursuing the PhD. Though at this point few have completed the doctorate, it seems likely that most graduates of this program will leave with quite impressive résumés.

The small size of the program might be viewed as both a strength and a weakness. A small cohort makes it easier to tailor each student’s course of study to his or her individual needs. The reputation of the program is not likely to be damaged by its somewhat elite appearance, and in

any case it would not be desirable to overproduce PhDs given the refined nature of the field's job market. On the less positive side, by admitting only one or two students per year the program is liable to be affected all the more when an individual decides to drop out, as has happened on at least one occasion. The small size of the program also perhaps makes it less feasible to add value by inviting outside speakers or allowing students to serve as teaching assistants or offer classes of their own, a potential drawback for those who may wish to remain in the academy.

II. Impact and Demand

As several of those who wrote letters of support pointed out, this was from the outset a notably well-conceived program, which drew on lessons learned from the non-approval of a preceding program in Art Conservation Research. The program under review here appears to have kept to its plan and shown an ability to attract well-qualified students, including, most recently, the Chief Conservator at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It has also succeeded in its aim of maximizing the advantages of access to the intellectual and material resources provided by the university. The program benefits from its endowment, the Coremans Endowment, and has seen several successful student efforts to leverage further resources from within and outside the university. There is every indication that the program as a whole, from admissions through mentoring and beyond, is administered skillfully, efficiently, and fairly.

III. Evaluation

To date the program has matriculated eleven students. Two of these have received the PhD; a third student successfully defended very recently (after the program's self-study), and a fourth is very close to defending. One student withdrew from the program. The first two graduates went on to, respectively, a Mellon Fellowship in Conservation Education and a postdoctoral fellowship in the Villanova University Department of Chemistry. This is a small sample, but nonetheless a promising one.

The program guidelines stipulate "a ceiling of five years for the completion of all requirements of the PhD degree, including the dissertation and defense." It may be noted that at least two students went above that ceiling.

IV. Additional Comments

The two authors of this review are in no doubt that this well-organized program deserves permanent status.

cc: Faculty Senate Graduate Studies Committee
Coordinating Committee on Education