

## Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

### Department/Program: Art History

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

In 2022-2023 we streamlined our learning goals for the Arts Core in Art History to the following three criteria:

- Students will be able to analyze the relationship between art and its historical context in a broadly defined geographic area and time span.
- Students will be able to fluently describe the formal properties of objects and images, explaining how they construct and convey meaning.
- Students will be able to make logical, clearly reasoned arguments about the purpose and meaning of art in human history.

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

They are published on our department website: <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/morrissey/departments/art/programs/art-history/major-minor.html#:~:text=Learning%20Outcomes-,Learning%20Outcomes,discipline's%20subfields%20across%20the%20globe>.

- 3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

In the previous two years, we have taken a sampling of the required term papers in ARTH1101 and ARTH1102 and rated them against one of our Learning Outcome questions.

This year, we instead decided to focus on students' reading skills, which we see as foundational to achieving all our Core learning goals. We therefore elected to evaluate an assignment in ARTH2280 that requires students to analyze the argument and structure of a scholarly text.

We evaluated the assignments on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest.

- 4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

Art History faculty read a selection of the student work in May. The collected data is submitted to the DUS (the 2025 reports are included at the end of this document). The Art History faculty meet to discuss the results in the fall semester.

- 5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

In our previous reviews, we have been satisfied with the ability of our students to meet our three primary learning goals, but faculty also noted that we could do more to support the cultivation of reading skills among our students. We therefore adjusted our evaluation process this year to focus specifically on reading abilities.

- 6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

2012 (external review)

## **2025 Reports**

**Nancy Netzer**

### **Ratings:**

Student 1: 5/5

Student 2: 2/5

### **Comments:**

Student 1 demonstrates a clear grasp of the article's central arguments, a nuanced understanding of its structural framework, and an accurate recognition of the key evidentiary support underpinning the author's conclusions.

Student 2 records a simplified version of the author's central argument, but conveys little understanding of the article's underlying structure and seems not to have grasped the concept of evidence.

## **Kevin Lotery**

### **Ratings:**

Student 3: 4.5/5

Student 4: 4/5

### **Comments:**

Student 3 demonstrates a clear understanding of Saba's intervention in the periodization of lusterware, particularly the way in which Saba argues for continuity, under the rubric of *ajab*, between the monochromatic and polychromatic idioms. Rather than see these as opposed, Saba—this student clearly indicates—sees a larger investigation into the “pleasurable wonder” of *ajab*. I do think, however, that the student neglects, like the other assessed assignment, some of the disciplinary stakes of the essay's argument. There is an indication that he has absorbed one crucial aspect of Saba's intervention, namely the critique of anachronistic, art-historical ways of periodizing and categorizing formal variation; however, I was hoping to see an analysis of Saba's call for situating lusterware within a larger context of Abbasid aesthetic production that would include artistic, industrial, and utilitarian objects (all of which, he notes, pursued the effects of *ajab*). In the process, we need to pay attention to the terms, desires, and aesthetic functions that were actually active at the time, rather than impose art historical frameworks from a different cultural or discursive field.

Student 4 demonstrates an understanding of major portions of the essay's argument, particularly when it comes to questions of form and technical analysis. The student also has a clear grasp of some of the major aesthetic concepts deployed in the essay, *ajab* most of all. The student clearly understands the *ajab* concept and has identified its key formal tactics and the ways in which it activates the user/spectator. I do think, however, that the student's assignment excludes some of the larger cultural and disciplinary stakes of the essay's argument, namely its intervention within the prevailing iconological methodologies that had initially and as Saba notes, incorrectly, differentiated the polychrome and monochrome lusterware on the basis of chromatic variation, rather than on the more phenomenological aspects of *ajab*—a concept, Saba argues, that conditioned aesthetic practice across a whole field of production. The student neglects, in other words, Saba's claim that we need to view Abbasid lusterware within a larger context of aesthetic production that would include artistic, industrial, and utilitarian objects. In doing so, Saba writes, we need to pay attention to the terms and conceptual frameworks that were actually active at the time, rather than impose art historical frameworks from a different cultural or discursive field.

## **John Lansdowne**

### **Ratings:**

Student 5: 4/5

Student 6: 4/5

## **Comments:**

The Main Claim presented by Student 5 captures the core problem introduced by Matthew Saba in his article, that the aesthetic shifts chronicled, in Saba's example, in the scholarly study of ninth-century Abbasid lusterware, "rely too much on what the interpreter thinks and not enough on the genuine interests and motivations of the societies that made said shifts." While that is indeed the core problem that the author poses, the student could have included more about the ramifications of that problem: very broadly, "our very understanding of the development of Abbasid lusterware [...] will need to be rethought." The student's first supporting claim, on "influence and imitation," is not well enough distinguished from the main claim, though he does offer solid evidence to support it. His second two supporting claims are more fulsome and directly on point. He rightfully outlines what I consider to be the central answer to the core problem posed by Saba: how the phrase *abū qalamūn*, used in relation to the surface effects of the lusterware, a phrase that evokes polyvalence and changeability (no matter what the design) indicates that these ceramics were designed specifically to elicit 'ajab, or wonder. The claims are themselves woven with concrete evidence in the way of technical and period terminology and in the types of artifacts chosen to lay out the argument. Yet in the Evidence section of the assignment, the student relies mostly on quotes and author interpretations. The more precise details and hard facts the better.

Student 6 hits on all points of the Main Claim presented by Matthew Saba in his article, though in a circuitous way, lacking in a stated thesis, and using too much ambiguous language. The five Supporting Ideas he provides are more clearly stated—succinct and on point. One might argue that several of these Ideas are quite related and might be rolled together into one. But I appreciate the deeper dive the student takes, attempting to separate the complexity and sheer richness of *abū qalamūn* both on its own terms and as it pertains to 'ajab. Together, all the Supporting Ideas successfully outline in full the author's argument. As for evidence, the student provides full quotations (with the page number citations). The evidence selected is indeed concrete and precise, sprinkled with facts, period terminology, and beyond. But in choosing to reprint quotations rather than crafting his own inventory, one wonders the extent to which the student is himself able to effectively explain and rehash the evidence, which includes complex Arabic terminology and complicated premodern philosophical and scientific theories pertaining to color, light, and eyesight. Setting that concern aside, the student excels at the assignment at hand: breaking down Saba's essay into its structural components.

## **Emine Fetvacı**

### **Ratings:**

Student 7: 5/5

Student 8: 5/5

**Comments:**

I worry that the students are now using AI to summarize their readings, but cannot really tell. Both students' submitted work identifies the main claim, supporting ideas and provides different kinds of evidence marshalled in the article.

**Aurelia Campbell****Ratings:**

Student 9: 3/5

Student 10: 2/5

**Comments:**

Student 9 got the general claim that people in the Abbasid period were drawn to lusterware based on their ability to evoke *ajab*, but I would have liked to see more evidence of the art historical context, i.e. art historians seem to classify these lusterwares according to traits that weren't necessarily important to the people who used them in the time they were produced. I the student puts it as part of a second supporting idea, but it seems to me to be part of the author's central claim. Many examples that the student cites as "evidence," actually seem more to be additional claims made by the author. I would have liked to see more of the primary historical material being cited as evidence.

Student 10 also seems to understand the main claim and some of the sub-arguments, but does not mention the context of current art historical scholarship. This student also did not cite any of the historical information or primary texts as evidence, but rather, like Student 9, cited more claims.

**Justin Brown****Ratings:**

**Students 11 & 12: 4/5**

**Comments:**

Overall, the students' work demonstrates a solid understanding of the assigned reading and an ability to effectively identify its main ideas and key arguments. The students are able to pinpoint central claims and recognize supporting evidence used by the author.

Nevertheless, the students appear to struggle to rephrase or paraphrase content in their own words. Instead of rearticulating the author's ideas with original language, students rely heavily

on quoting the original text. This may indicate one of two things: (1) a need to further develop critical reading skills; (2) a lack of confidence in expressing ideas independently.

In future assignments, it may be beneficial to focus more explicitly on activities that help students build their own analytical voice.

**Oliver Wunsch**

**Ratings:**

**Student 13: 4/5**

**Student 14: 5/5**

**Comments:**

Both students recognized the author's central thesis that Abbasid lustreware fulfilled an expectation of wonder through iridescent surface effects. Both students were able to cite evidence that the author used to support this claim. Student 13, however, did not mention the methodological aspects of the argument, making no mention of how the author's approach differed from that of previous art historians. Student 14, by contrast, was able to identify the implied, methodological thesis of the essay: previous scholars have not fully understood Abbasid lustreware because of a tendency to emphasize coloristic distinctions that typically structure art history, overlooking the salient terms for the original audience.