

**MUSEUM STUDIES PROGRAM  
ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR 2020-21  
DECEMBER 2021**

**(note that courses for this assessment were delivered completely remotely)**

Name of Program: Museum Studies M.A. Program

Type of Program: Graduate (Master of Arts)

Department: Art + Architecture

College of Arts and Sciences

Submitter: Paula Birnbaum, Professor and Academic Director

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**Mission Statement (no changes in 2020-21)**

The mission of the University of San Francisco's **Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Museum Studies** is to shape leaders in museums and cultural organizations of all disciplines. Through a curriculum that emphasizes social justice, community engagement and hands-on experience, students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to strategically transform museums in a constantly changing global context.

**Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) (no changes in 2020-21)**

Students who complete the M.A. in Museum Studies will be able to:

- 1) Articulate a critical understanding of the histories, challenges and methodologies related to museums as complex public service organizations.
- 2) Analyze institutional practices in light of USF's mission of social justice.
- 3) Apply skills and knowledge essential for successful professional patterns of behavior and practice in all types of museums and like organizations.

**Academic Program Review:** the Museum Studies M.A. Program had its very first Academic Program Review in Spring 2019. The external reviewers advised that we try to streamline and simplify our assessment process, and so we have attempted to do that with this year's assessment of PLO #2.

Assessment Schedule since last APR:

- Fall 2019 (AY 2018-19): PLO#1
- Fall 2020 (AY 2019-20): Remote instruction assessment
- Fall 2021 (AY 2021-22): PLO #2
- Fall 2022 (AY 2022-23): PLO #3

**MUSE PLO #2:** Analyze institutional practices in light of USF's mission of social justice.

USF's mission statement was revised during this same period of assessment. In preparing this report we focused on the following excerpt from the university's revised mission statement, with the idea that students who complete our Museum Studies M.A. degree should be able to analyze

the institutional practices of museums and other cultural heritage organizations in light of our own university's commitment "to be persons for and with others, to care for our common home, including the native lands on which our campuses reside, and to promote the common good by critically, thoughtfully, and innovatively addressing inequities to create a more humane and just world."

During the past two years of the pandemic and racial justice crisis, many museums have begun to shift their focus from caring for objects to caring for people and communities. Aware of their colonialist and imperialist legacies, museums and like-minded organizations are looking to address issues including equality and social justice in meaningful ways that align with USF's Jesuit Catholic mission through their institutional practices.

Faculty assessed PLO #2 using one assignment from three different required courses that students take as they progress through the program. We wanted to examine the progression of student learning and ability to analyze institutional practices in light of USF's mission of social justice at the Introductory, Developing, Competent and Mastery levels.

The attached rubric (see separate document) was developed to assess PLO # 2 across three classes: MUSE 600: Museum Studies: History/Theory; MUSE 611: Cultural Heritage and Social Justice; MUSE 630: Museum Studies Capstone.

In what follows, we will review the measurement tools used for each of the three courses and their respective assignments (A-C):

#### **A. Measurement Tools for MUSE 600: Museum Studies: History/Theory**

One of the 8 required weekly "Reading Summary/Reflection Papers" assigned for this course was used to assess this PLO. The class read work by four different authors on the theme of "racial-justice and identity-focused museums" that relates directly to USF's social justice mission. Faculty read 8 reflection papers on these readings and scored them measuring six traits, using the rubric above. The expectation was that all students would be at the beginning or developing levels.

#### **Direct Data for assessing PLO# 1 in MUSE 600, Weekly Reading Summary/Reflection Paper:**

Introductory:	25%
Developing:	50%
Competent:	25%
Mastery:	0%

**Analysis for MUSE 600:** One of the stated learning outcomes of the Museum Studies: History/Theory course (MUS 600) that aligns directly to PLO#2 is that students will: *Have gained practice in discussing, leading discussions and writing critically about museum studies literature and critical museum functions and issues.*

Faculty used the written work students completed for this weekly written reading response to assess this learning outcome from the Fall 2020 course, MUSE 600. Weekly reading response papers encourage and demonstrate critical thinking about important social justice issues in the field and demonstrate students' knowledge of, and ability to, use recognized and peer-reviewed museum research resources (including books, journals, museum and AAM websites etc.). In short, this assignment required the students to critically read, summarize and respond to four scholarly sources on the theme of racial justice in the museum field, which relates directly to USF's Jesuit values of social justice.

### **What aligned with your expectations?**

Most students are learning during their first semester of study to integrate current literature and their knowledge of current issues and problems around social justice and equity in the field in relation to the history and theory of museums through weekly reading response papers. Half of the students wrote “developing” level papers, with a quarter at the “introductory” level and another quarter at the “competent” level. We were pleasantly surprised to see that some students’ understanding and discussion of the relationship between museums’ institutional practices and social justice values in this introductory course is already at a solid level of professionalism, with room to aspire to “mastery” level.

### **What do you understand these results to mean?**

We believe these results provide evidence that our students are committed to learning to apply the established standards and practices of critical thinking and engaging with the history and theory of museums to better understand the field’s current efforts to change and adapt institutional practices in line with social justice values. These weekly required written reflection papers, accompanied by an an-class presentation and discussion led by a group of students, is an appropriate assignment for assessing PLO #2. It also prepares students for deeper research into the relationship between museums and social justice in their final research papers in MUSE 600 as well as in their second semester in the program’s required “Cultural Heritage and Social Justice” class.

### **What are the implications of the data?**

The required course MUSE 600 is taken during the first semester (fall) in the graduate program and is seen as the foundational course. Students come to the program with varied levels of educational and professional backgrounds and experience, as well as various levels of familiarity with social justice values and pedagogy. This is reflected in the results of the assessment of this assignment. We have already begun to use our assessment of this written reading summary/reflection as a kind of “litmus test” for students who struggle with writing, and we strongly encouraged these students to take a graduate level writing class in the spring semester.

One thing we learned from this assessment is that we might reconsider revising the language in PLO #2 to incorporate the social justice mission of the profession as espoused by the national organization for the museum field, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM): “The American Alliance of Museums’ mission is to champion equitable and impactful museums by connecting people, fostering learning and community, and nurturing museum excellence.”

### **B. Measurement Tools for assessing PLO# 2 at the Developing level in MUSE 611, Cultural Heritage and Social Justice:**

One of the stated learning outcomes of the Cultural Heritage & Social Justice course (MUS 611) that aligns directly to PLO#2 is that students will: “Gain a studied awareness of common methodologies and approaches to examining cultural heritage and the role of museums in society.” *Students will accomplish this by individually and collectively engaging primary and secondary textual sources selected from a range of art historical, museological, and interdisciplinary approaches. Class discussions will address the nature of the arguments in these texts, as well as their underlying assumptions and methodologies. In their term papers, students will be required to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of different methodological approaches that other scholars have applied to their topic of interest.*

Faculty used the written work students completed for the Final Research Paper assignment in MUSE 611 in Spring 2021 to assess PLO#2. A substantial research paper assignment encourages and demonstrates critical thinking about important issues in the field and demonstrates students’ knowledge of, and ability to, use recognized and peer-reviewed museum research resources (including books, journals, museum and AAM websites etc.)

In short, this multi-part assignment required the students to select a relevant topic informed by the course syllabus (focus on cultural heritage and social justice), identify scholarly sources (mix of primary and secondary), write an annotated bibliography, and then write out their argument in the body of the paper.

Faculty assessment of this assignment showed with the following results:

**Direct Data for assessing PLO# 2 in MUSE 611, Final Research Paper assignment:**

Introductory:	0%
Developing:	25%
Competent:	50%
Mastery:	25%

**What aligned with your expectations?**

Faculty was pleased by these results. This course is taken primarily by students in their second semester of the program. We are encouraged by the mix between “developing,” “competent” and “mastery,” as well as by the progression from MUSE 600. Nearly all of students were able to apply and integrate some current issues and literature in the field of cultural heritage, social justice and ethics to at least one specific institution. Half of them demonstrated “competency” in their ability to analyze social justice issues in cultural heritage studies, with one quarter at the “developing” level and the other quarter at the “mastery” level.

The students seem to be learning to integrate current literature and professional practice into a final research paper at the conclusion of their second semester of study. Some students’ applications of these issues within institutional practices is sophisticated, while others are first learning how to articulate a strong argument for social justice responsibilities on behalf of an institution and will benefit from furthering their knowledge of ethical museum practices in future courses such as the Internship and Capstone courses and their relevant assignments.

**What do you understand these results to mean?**

We believe these results provide evidence that our students are committed to learning to think critically and creatively about complex and interrelated museum practices that involve various ethical and social justice concerns, and to propose courses of action to address these concerns in a practical way. This final research paper is an appropriate assignment for assessing PLO #2. Some students continued with their research topics for this assignment in their culminating capstone papers and projects in the program

**What are the implications of the data?**

The data implies are that we should continue to have students research institutional case studies in order to help apply skills and social-justice values in the museum profession.

**C. Measurement Tools for assessing PLO# 2 at the Mastery level in MUSE 630: Museum Studies Capstone:**

**Review MUSE 630/Capstone course (required) – final written capstones.**

In their final semester of the program, students complete an independent research project focused on a current or historical issue or problem within the museum field that relates to their professional interests. The capstone is supervised as a Directed Study course by a faculty member and culminates in a final portfolio or research paper of 30-50 pages (double-spaced, roughly 7500-12,000 words), followed in Fall 2020 by a public presentation on Zoom synthesizing their learning experience in the program just prior to the December graduation. Faculty assessed the final written papers and/or project reports of students enrolled in the Capstone course in Fall 2020.

### **Direct Data for assessing PLO# 2 at the Mastery level in MUSE 630:**

Introductory: 0%  
 Developing: 0%  
 Competent: 12.5%  
 Mastery: 87.5%

#### **What aligned with your expectations?**

We were very pleased to see that all but one of the final capstones all were scored at the level of “Mastery” for PLO#2 and students uniformly were able to articulate a critical understanding of the institutional practices of museums and cultural heritage organizations in light of USF’s mission of social justice.

#### **What do you understand these results to mean?**

By the time of their fourth and final semester in our 16-month M.A. program, most students have obtained an excellent understanding of this key learning outcome that is essential for success in the professional museum field. We do nonetheless continue to have students in the program who struggle with writing and in this case one such student was less able to express mastery of this PLO.

#### **What are the implications of the data?**

The progression of courses in our curriculum successfully positions students to obtain a thorough understanding of museums as complex public service organizations with institutional responsibilities to work with their communities to overcome challenges that include poverty, racism, xenophobia and other forms of exclusion, and to achieve equality of outcomes. This understanding in turn provides students with important knowledge and critical thinking skills to succeed in the field. Our Museum Studies M.A. Program at USF attracts students with professional and curricular interests in social justice values in the museum field. While the capstones that were assessed were chosen randomly, we recognize that they represent a subset of all students in a given cohort, and there may be some students who are not yet at the mastery level. As stated above, students with writing challenges struggle more with demonstrating mastery of the Program Learning Outcomes. While we are presently exploring different models for the running the capstone as more project-based, these results are encouraging that students are in fact progressing in their knowledge of PLO#2 as they advance through the curriculum.

#### **Final Results of AY 2020-21 Assessment:**

**Closing the Loop:** In AY2021-22, MUSE faculty are in dialogue regarding how we can use our assessment and APR results to further refine the curriculum. We wish to reevaluate the number of units for the internship course, required versus elective courses, how to navigate course enrollment caps, new models for the capstone, especially for those with writing challenges, and how to recruit more faculty to supervise capstones. Following these discussions, we may choose to revise our curriculum and then revise the Curricular Map and possibly the progression of courses taken throughout the sixteen-month program to ensure that the students have ample opportunities in all of their courses to develop professional skills.

Finally, we will continue to reassess our assessment methodology. Next year we might consider new strategies for assessment that include: 1) tailoring the language in assignments to “match” specific PLOs (we made such an adjustment last year for PLO#1 following assessment); 2) creating online rubrics embedded in Canvas, which many of our faculty use in their courses, as they may be more effective for measuring our PLOs for courses taught by multiple faculty members. This will allow us to incorporate assessment more directly into existing course assignments so that we can capture more data with less effort.