



DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Art History Department
6033 Carpenter Hall
Hanover, NH 03755-3570
(603) 646-1332 — FAX (603) 646-3428
email: ada.cohen@dartmouth.edu

ADA COHEN
*Associate Professor
Chair*

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Mr. Joseph Asch
12 Woodrow Road
Hanover NH 03755

Dear Joe,

The Art History Department would like to update you on the departmental editing program, which you have so generously funded the last eight years. As we have expressed in previous reports to you, the writing program is an integral part of our department's offerings and a great benefit to our students and faculty. Our writing specialist, Iona McAulay, is available to our students throughout the term, and her assistance is especially beneficial to those students who, for a variety of reasons, struggle with the mechanics of writing. In frequent one-on-one meetings, Iona can give them the extra attention and the detailed instruction they require.

This year, as in the past, Iona has worked with students both formally, in connection with specific classes, and informally through referrals of individual students by their professors. In addition, she has worked with many students who come to her on their own initiative. Under Iona's expert guidance, the students have made substantial progress crafting their papers, and in many cases their writing has improved dramatically. Clearly, the program has been a success.

Iona has been especially helpful in tutoring students who are new to the discipline of art history and who enroll in the first year seminars, the art history surveys, and sometimes in mid-level courses. As Professor Mary Coffey notes "these students often have a hard time understanding how to write an art history paper, despite the many online and published resources we provide." Most students arrive at Dartmouth having never written a critical analysis or even a straightforward descriptive essay about a work of art. Although they come from a visually oriented culture, they rarely have been asked to think and write about the meaning or significance of images prior to college. Because these deficiencies make the process of writing papers for our courses especially difficult, students are encouraged to meet with the writing editor as soon as possible. Those who do consult with Iona tend to write much better papers than those who don't. With Iona's assistance they learn how to avoid excessive wordiness, mangled and incoherent sentence structure, and poor word choice. Iona prods them to be clear and concise in their written expression. When (as in the case of Joy Kenseth's Michelangelo course) the editor works with students on many assignments during a term, their writing skills improve substantially. As Professor Kenseth explains, "the students in the class were required to complete four writing assignments during the term. We tracked their progress very carefully and found that all but a few had become significantly better writers."

Many art history students, Professor Jordan observes, will submit drafts to Iona each term and “consistently their papers are better written than they otherwise would be. Over the years it is clear that Iona’s most lasting effect is on the repeaters, the students who use her services over more than one term and even—as with some recent seniors—over the whole four years. Several of these students have become excellent writers, making up the deficit left by our secondary school system.”

The writing editor is a special boon to art history faculty who have large classes. Mary Coffey has found that Iona has been most helpful in the surveys, such as Art History 2, which usually have 95–100 students. Although these courses are usually team taught, it is “nearly impossible for the two professors to work closely with them on their writing while teaching and grading and fielding questions about course content.” The writing component of these courses is considerable since students are required to take essay, not multiple-choice exams, in addition to completing formal papers. As Professor Marlene Heck points out, “there isn’t time in a ten-week term in a large class to devote close attention” to student writing. “In my larger lecture classes—which typically run from 50–75 students (or 80+ as this term), Iona is able to meet with so many more of the students than I can handle in office hour consultations.” In general, faculty are grateful to be relieved of teaching the mechanics of writing so that they may concentrate instead on the content, the arguments, and logic of students’ papers.

Our department greatly appreciates Iona McAulay’s dedication to the students. She provides excellent assistance to art history majors writing senior theses, just as she does to those students taking art history for the first time. She is a patient tutor who understands the anxieties of inexperienced writers, and her critiques of their work are always thoughtful and sensitive. All the students who have worked with her mention how helpful and nice she is. On some occasions students have continued their association with Iona beyond graduation. Colleagues feel privileged to have her in the department, near at hand, which allows for consultations with her on a regular basis and makes it possible to refer students to her on-the-spot if necessary. A valuable resource for our students, Iona is also a wonderful colleague to the faculty. Indeed, as Marlene Heck recently remarked, “I can’t imagine the Art History Department without Iona.”

Thank you again for your generosity. We hope very much that Iona will be able to continue her work in the department.

Sincerely yours,

Ada Cohen
Acting Chair
Department of Art History