



# Department of the History of Art

## Building an Online Academic Community

<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/hierarchy/info/showcase/exemplar/hoa>

Oxford's Virtual Learning Environment, WebLearn, has been radically overhauled. The new WebLearn offers improved support for teaching, learning, and research, with features that enable online communication, collaboration and assessment.

*"I think that the fact it looks more 'grown-up' than current WebLearn is not irrelevant. The one thing I still miss about WebLearn as it currently is, is the ability to group email every member of a class, so I am delighted that this is a key feature of the new WebLearn."*

**Craig Clunas,  
Professor of History of Art**

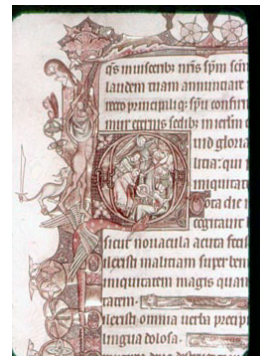
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The History of Art Department is a teaching and research department within the History Faculty which is part of the Humanities Division. In addition to its full-time academic staff, there are more than fifty associated academic staff across the University with interests in History of Art and Visual Culture. These colleagues contribute to the teaching programmes and reinforce the Department's dynamic interdisciplinary approach.

The Department currently offers sixteen BA and twenty MSt places per year and currently has twenty-four research students. The departmental website is the external face of the Department for undergraduate and graduate recruitment, and provides information for other Art History departments and independent researchers.

The Department has a rich range of visual resources including a 35mm slide collection and photographic archive, and WebLearn also serves as a platform for promoting access to these resources. This area of WebLearn also contains links to digital image resources, namely the OUCS OXCLIC (MDID) and ARTstor digital image databases.



Since the academic year 2006-7, the Department has used WebLearn for distributing teaching materials to students, the provision of administrative information for staff, and a regularly updated internal student database (as a private intranet). Academic staff have their own teaching areas in WebLearn which they manage and in which they upload information including syllabi, reading lists, bibliographies and weekly handouts. Students can access links to these resources through their own cohort pages which also contain programme specifications, course handbooks and other essential information.

Student representatives for each cohort have been provided with their own areas for communicating with their peers, and academic visitors have been given their own areas in order to convey their research interests to the rest of the Department.

The screenshot shows the WebLearn interface for the Department of the History of Art. The top navigation bar includes 'Welcome', 'Humanities', 'Faculty of History', 'History of Art', and 'Risk Visual Resources Centre'. The main content area is titled 'history art' and features a sidebar with links for Home, Resources, ARTstor, Photographic Collections, Presentation, Site Info, Search, Help, and New Site. The main content area displays three collections: 'Bartsch Archive' (30 slander boxes of mounted photographs), 'Beal Collection' (12,000 postcards), and 'Braun Photographs' (125 loose mounted photographic reproductions).

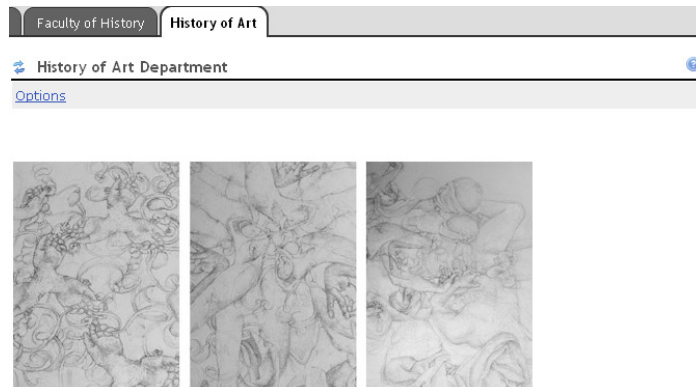
Whilst the old WebLearn system has served its purpose, it was found to be limited in scope, accessibility and functionality. The Department has therefore been keen to embrace the new system because of its potential to address these shortcomings. It is envisaged that the new structure will improve cross-departmental interaction with associated academics and the wider art-historical community in Oxford who can be members of multiple sites. Migrating material across from the old WebLearn system provided the opportunity to review the shortfalls of the old structure and to design a more effective hierarchy of sites.

The Department currently uses Webmail to interact with staff and students. One of the immediate advantages of the new WebLearn is the ability to send and archive group email to members of sites, using the 'Email Archive' or 'Announcements' tools. Such has been the demand for this feature that a site has now been created for each course, allowing academic staff to maintain their own course areas and target specific groups of students in their communications.

Documents and images have been uploaded into the Resources tool and different access rights to folders and files have been assigned. We are exploring various other features available, such as Presentations, Reading Lists, and Site Stats (tracking) tools, as well as the Assignments tool with Turnitin plagiarism detection. We are also focusing on the appearance of the sites (we are after all a visual studies department!).

The new WebLearn makes it easy to protect copyrighted materials, as copyright notices can be appended to individual files; this is very useful for the Department as we use a lot of copyright protected images.

The new system has been piloted with core academic staff, visiting researchers and student representatives who have agreed that the new interface is more aesthetically pleasing, more flexible and intuitive in terms of navigation. Other new features that particularly appeal to the Department are Schedule (Calendar), Announcements and Forums because they can be constantly updated to reflect the 'live' activities taking place, keeping our site members informed and involved.



Welcome to the pilot History of Art Department pages on the new WebLearn.

For general information about the department, please visit the departmental website at <http://www.hoa.ox.ac.uk>

For information specific to current students and staff, please click on the relevant HoA subsite under the 'My Active Sites' tab on the top right or follow the links on the left-hand side.

Click [here](#) for lecture lists.

My Workspace My Active Sites

Calendar

Options

June, 2009 < Today >

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

Recent Announcements

Options

- New History of Art WebLearn!**  
(Victoria Brown - 21-May-2009 15:12)

The new HoA sites will go LIVE MT09 when the old WebLearn will no longer be current.

history of art

Home Resources Schedule Announcements Email Archive Forums Polls Tasks, Tests and Surveys Wiki Mailtool

Forums

New Forum | Organise | Template Settings | Statistics | Pending Messages (0)

Forums

**HOA pilot feedback**  
[Read Full Description](#)

**Feedback from Team Meeting 16th Feb 09** ( 0 message - 0 unread; Moderated )  
[Read Full Description](#)

**Feedback from team meeting 8th June 08** ( 5 messages - 5 unread )  
Please give us your feedback by 13th June

We have tested the Forum (Discussions) tool as a means of gathering feedback and plan to further utilise this across our sites for student-tutor interaction.

The Site Members tool, which allows photos of site participants to be viewed, enables the Department to more easily identify its students and associated academics, and further enhance the sense of community.

The Department is looking forward to exploring the full potential of the available tools as the service moves out of its pilot phase. As the sites are developed and populated, further feedback will be sought with the intention of going fully live at the start of the Michaelmas Term 2009.

Vicky Brown and Rachel Woodruff, May 2009



<http://weblearn.ox.ac.uk>