Making and Meaning:
Undergraduate Research in the Visual and Interdisciplinary Arts

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Overview

- Introduction
- Inquiry
- Working Within the Curriculum
- Question and Answer Period
- Working Beyond the Curriculum
- Conclusion
The Art of Inquiry Part A

Look carefully at the art work and silently formulate questions
The Art of Inquiry Part B

- Ask any question but refrain from statements that express judgment
- Participants listen carefully to questions and decide as a group which are most significant

Discuss the most significant questions
Working Within the Curriculum

Undergraduate Research in the Visual Arts
How can UR be embedded in a visual arts curriculum?

- Definitions
- How do our students go about doing UR? (approaches and examples)
- What is the faculty’s role?
In UNC Asheville’s Department of Art, 100% of graduating art students are credited with doing undergraduate research because each is required to produce a solo exhibition approved by faculty.
Example of a B. F. A. solo exhibition
What is Undergraduate Research?
U. S. News and World Report Definition of Undergraduate Research

- “Self directed academic work by an individual student or by small groups of students that deals with an open-ended issue with the expectation of a scholarly or creative product that can be formally presented on or off campus. Such work is undertaken with a faculty mentor for at least one academic term or intensive summer, and students understand their roles as researchers/creators and act in those roles”.
Tom Schram, art student: “A visual arts research project begins with curiosity and a series of experiments designed around a particular concept. In creating art, we learn from our successes but mostly from our failures, very much like scientists work in terms of trial and error....
Like scientists, we repeat this process over and over until we find out what we want to know about what we are making. This is why artists work in a series just as scientists repeat experiments until the design and methodology are honed and the results are determined.”
How do our students accomplish undergraduate research?

- Narrowing the topic
- Developing a research question
- Process of making/methodology
- Expanding the research “model”
- Significant outcome/multiple avenues
Narrowing a topic

- Comparison to writing a term paper
- General area may already be narrow in terms of studio concentration
- In Senior Exhibitions and B. A. Seminar, students are already beginning to focus on one theme and one medium.
Developing a research question

- What are you trying to find out?
- How are you going to go about doing this?
- What is the intended outcome?
- Is it a significant outcome?
How can contemporary sequential art fuse both Renaissance painting traditions and graphic novels?

*In The Den*, Larkin Ford, 48” x 96”, charcoal on paper, 2008
An exploration of self identity through the process of drawing self portraits on draped fabric

*Veiled Series*, Megan Van Deusen, 72” x 60” approximately, mixed media on fabric, 2009
Using cinematic techniques to expand the concept of narrative in painting

Cats, Sara Bernardi, 40” x 72”, oil on canvas, 2011
Process of Making/Methodology

- Honing of technique
- Search for a personal voice
- Testing the “hypothesis”, i.e., working in a series of related images
Expanding the research “model”

- Keeping a journal of drawings, observations, notations as visual research
- Process of trial and error (conceptualize, create, critique)
- Developing a library research component that supports the series (knowing one’s context)
Possible Significant Outcomes

- A final exhibition and accompanying research paper (required)
- An additional UR project intended for funding
- A formal oral presentation that reports findings (campus symposium, NCUR, or state/regional conference)
- Publishing the research findings in a national, regional or university publication
Multiple routes to get there

- In a credit bearing course
- As an interdisciplinary project
- Combined with study abroad or other travel
- Funding through URPAC
- Funding through summer Faculty/Student Research Partnerships
- Funding through other granting agencies
Examples

- New “recipes” for the ancient process of painting with hot wax (encaustic)
- Design and building of an anagama kiln based on ancient/contemporary examples
- Master copy painting in the Louvre Museum to hone technique
- Determining ways to recycle toxic glazes for use in glass casting
Examples, continued

- Producing **drawings for a book** on regional folklore
- Re-examining the use of the **female nude** as an **icon** in art history
- Determining ideal chemical mixtures and firing temperature for **crystalline glazes**
- **Traveling to Nepal** to research the meaning and imagery of prayer flags
What is the faculty member’s role?

- Talent scout
- Guide
- Nurturer of independent thinking
- Editor
- Evaluator
- Public speaking coach
Question and Answer period
Working Beyond the Curriculum

Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research in the Humanities
Making and Meaning: Craft Art in Practice, Experience and Theory

- Introduction
- Proposal abstract
- Formulating the idea with a faculty team
- Writing the proposal
- The trajectory of the project and its components
- Representative disciplines
- Means of assessment/what we learned
Introduction

Why I became interested in interdisciplinary undergraduate research (as opposed to working solely within the visual arts discipline)
Formulating the idea and writing the proposal

- NCUR Lancy Grant opportunity
- Project abstract
- Faculty team from different disciplines
- Convergence of initiatives
- Writing and re-writing the grant
Proposal Abstract

- Seeks funding for **10 students** to participate in an 8 week summer research program with a team of **4 faculty members**

- Draws on a national effort to define and develop a field of inquiry known as “Craft Studies”

- Offers an opportunity to join in a collaborative effort to explore craft in WNC
Students from a number of disciplines will study the culture of craft arts--their material, social and economic resources. Their aesthetic and social values for various audiences. The practices and processes of making crafted objects.
Objectives were four-fold.

- *Interdisciplinary investigation* into the significance of craft art in WNC
- Involve students in *meaningful research* which complements liberal studies
- To enrich UNC Asheville’s summer UR program
- To generate enthusiasm for and *integrate UR activities* across the disciplines
Faculty team

- Virginia Derryberry, Professor, Studio Art and Principle Investigator
- Dr. Virginia Spivey, Assistant Professor, Art History
- Dr. Leah Mathews, Associate Professor, Economics
- Dr. Karin Peterson, Associate Professor, Sociology
Convergence of Initiatives

- New integrative liberal studies curriculum
- Strong craft heritage in WNC
- Newly proposed Craft Campus (a green facility on a former landfill site)
- Newly formed “Craft Studies Curriculum” committee to study the feasibility of a new program of study to complement studio craft on the Craft Campus
Trajectory of the project and its components

- Call for participation
- Evaluating student proposals
- Group retreat at Penland School
- Planning sessions
- Summer learning community/group retreat
- Writing up
- Oral presentations at NCUR 06
Representative disciplines

- Sociology/Anthropology
- Economics
- Environmental Science
- Multimedia/Computer Science
- Visual Arts: Ceramics, Sculpture, Book Arts, Art History
- Psychology
- Political Science
Assessment/what we learned

- Means of assessment
- What did we do well?
- What could we have done better?
Means of Assessment

- Group formative assessment
- Group summative assessment
- Final report (including summative evaluations, budget and achievement of goals) by me as Principle Investigator
What did we do well?

- “Inclusive” call for participation
- Linkages to liberal studies program
- Preliminary retreat location and program
- Empowerment of students
- Requirement of a final outcome
- Good pay for faculty/student team
- Good use of craft community members
What could we have done better?

- Better preparation for all the paperwork and budgetary planning
- A more streamlined process of assessment
- More funds for visiting “experts”
- A campus-wide presentation other than just NCUR
- A follow up grant proposal
Benefits to the student

- Experience in writing about and in oral defense of the work
- Experience in writing a grant proposal
- Production of a serious body of work that becomes a portfolio, writing samples or other documentation for graduate school or other professional experience
- Experience in public speaking
- Overall improvement in setting goals
Benefits to the faculty mentor

- Fostering excellence
- Fostering independent thinking
- Increased depth and focus in teaching
- Increased ability to think outside the box and staying current with student interests
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary experiences
- Possibility of scholarly outcomes
Conclusions

The significance of undergraduate research in the life of the small university