

Volume 36

**FATE in Review, 2017–2018**

Foundations in Art: Theory and Education

Volume 36

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Foundations in Art: Theory and Education

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Judith Mohns  
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Art and Art Education Program  
Columbia University Teachers College

## What's Going on with Foundations Students These Days? A Pilot Study of Faculty Perceptions of First Year College Art Students

Since you began teaching, have you observed that art students have changed?

*Yeah...in ten years there's certainly been a lot of change here...though one thing is a constant... there will always be young people with the passion to do this kind of work who want to know more... (Roger)*

*I'm not sure about manual skills, I think roughly they're about the same. I think the image thing is a lot different. I mean, the whole appropriation of imagery and stuff like that—they don't even know that that's what they're doing... (Jan)*

*Yes, dramatically...they might not know exactly how a camera works, but I think they are far more adept and facile at figuring out how to make a program work for them...their sophistication and understanding of an image [is striking], (because everything is so image-based, whether it is still or moving), and also their sophistication and understanding of text... (Alex)*

For the last five years, I have been recording the voices of foundations art faculty describing their perceptions of students, their teaching, and the changes they have observed during their teaching careers. As part of my doctoral studies at Columbia University Teachers College, I conducted a pilot study between 2012-2014 to explore how foundations faculty perceive students in terms of artistic skills and dispositions, and modify their teaching in response. My personal experiences as a foundations art student, foundations instructor, and high school art teacher have formed the basis of my inquiry, and this preliminary study served to test the research design and interview questions before embarking on an expanded study for my dissertation. For this pilot study, I interviewed six mid-career art instructors who primarily teach foundations courses at a nearby state liberal arts college or local community college, both located in the Northeast. The interview transcripts were coded and analyzed, and served as the primary data for the study.

In short, this study confirmed the need for further research, as it suggests that foundations art students have changed significantly over the past two decades due to many factors, and that foundations teaching is changing in response. Moreover, the faculty participants described the need to teach far more than manual and technical art skills, including: interpersonal communication skills; techniques for managing time, stress, and anxiety; technology use; the roles that patience, frustration, failure, and grading play in the creative process; and the importance of connecting artmaking to life experiences. The perceptions of these college instructors also reflect the larger forces that have reshaped K-12 education in the United States, including significant cuts in funding for art education in schools, and an assessment-driven culture that privileges testable knowledge over divergent thinking. At the post-secondary

level, the financial challenges faced by many students and their families result in a focus on the acquisition of job skills while pursuing undergraduate art studies.

The lack of existing academic research involving first year college art education in the United States<sup>1</sup> leaves unanswered questions about the current state of foundations teaching, particularly as programs transform to incorporate digital media into their curricula. While many conference presentations, journal articles, and books advocate for specific content and pedagogical approaches in foundations art education, they are often based on the authors' personal experiences, teaching philosophy, or understanding of contemporary art and criticism.

In this quickly changing, assessment-driven environment, more academic research involving faculty and students is needed to make informed curricular and policy decisions. In many fields, and commonly in education, qualitative research is used to supplement statistical data and generates a different kind of knowledge: rich, descriptive information about human experiences not captured through other means,<sup>2</sup> which may, in this instance, provide an important read on what is taking place in college art classrooms.

Throughout this study, I read extensively to deepen my understanding of the issues raised and to provide a framework for analyzing the participants' responses. For instance, books by writer Nicholas Carr (*The Shallows*)<sup>3</sup> and neuroscientist Daniel Levitin (*The Organized Mind*),<sup>4</sup> explained the cognitive effects that extensive interaction with computers, personal devices, and the Internet can have on learning, concentration, and research skills. Ultimately, this addictive interaction can disrupt one's ability to engage with the deep thought required for sustained creative work. Sherry Turkle's

book, *Alone Together*,<sup>5</sup> and her follow-up *TED Talk*,<sup>6</sup> clarified for me how digital devices affect communication and interpersonal relationships among young people, often causing profound discomfort with solitude. When it comes to teaching art today, I personally agree with Melvin Kranzberg's famous statement, "Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral,"<sup>7</sup> and I appreciate Clive Thompson's enthusiasm<sup>8</sup> for the amazing possibilities afforded by technology for creative work, education, and communication today.

When participants told me of their students' desires to imitate the aesthetics of online images, Howard Gardner and Katie Davis' book, *The App Generation*,<sup>9</sup> explained how social media can influence adolescent identity development, aesthetic appreciation, and creative thinking in young adults. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's writings on creativity and "flow"<sup>10</sup> illuminated the conditions that facilitate creative work, and the work of Steven Madoff and James Elkins explained the history and nature of teaching in art schools.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Levine and Diane Dean's book, *Generation on a Tightrope*,<sup>12</sup> used large longitudinal studies to document the changing characteristics of undergraduate students in the United States today. I have read the scant existing academic research involving foundations year programs<sup>13</sup> and attended various conferences and symposia to better understand the issues associated with first year college art education. Clearly, there are myriad reasons for the changes affecting students in general and art education at both the high school and college level, and educators are challenged to adapt to these changes.

Foundations year is a seminal time in an art student's education, and as Stacey McKenna Salazar suggests, "while disconnects occurred at many levels of post-secondary art education, challenges to learning were most apparent in the foundations year of art college."<sup>14</sup> These challenges are due, in part, to the transition first year students undergo

While differences among students always exist, even within the same class, it can be difficult to assess how students in general are changing over time and how teachers are responding pedagogically.

as they leave home and high school, and enter the college art school environment. A growing number of first year students (and not just fine arts majors) enter college today suffering from anxiety disorders, mental health issues, or learning disabilities, and many must learn basic life skills, such as time management and healthy lifestyle habits, during this first year in college.<sup>15</sup>

*Yeah...Well, they tell us we're getting better students...I think that's true in the sense that these are kids who learned how to be students, how to take the test, how to get good SAT scores, how to follow instructions. The students I've been getting, say, in the last five to ten years, are much better at following instructions. They'll do what you ask them to, they show up to class all the time. They are very obedient, conformist students. But if you ask them to do anything where they have to make the decisions, anything that really is predicated on fostering creative thinking rather than just following directions, I don't think they're as good as some of the students I used to have. (Peter)*

This research emerged from my personal experiences as an art student and teacher. I taught foundations courses for a total of six years in two different art programs, and for five years I helped high school students develop portfolios for admission to college art programs. To teach effectively, I had to develop insight into my students' needs, past art experiences, and unique abilities, as their childhood experiences with play, learning, and making were quite distinct from my own. Furthermore, I had to recognize that high-stakes testing and K-12 education reforms,

along with the ubiquity of computers and personal digital devices, have changed how students approach learning and creative work.

*I grew up with a lot of independent play... I went outside and I played and I built things... and a lot of my friends did as well. So that negotiation, in a peer group, face-to-face instead of in front of a screen, was really fundamental in my own learning but also in terms of the way I thought about the world. And now I find students have great difficulty in their manual skill set because much of their experiences has been virtual... and so their ability to have a discussion in a group—or even function within a group setting—is very privatized. They are much less apt to engage with people around them because of their reliance on technology and the ease of it. (Ryan)*

Because many instructors regularly self-assess, reflect, and modify their teaching practice from semester to semester, they are most likely already addressing the changing needs of their students. Teaching responsively, based on what previously worked well while continually reassessing and trying new things, is what Donald Schön called “reflective practice.”<sup>16</sup> While differences among students always exist, even within the same class, it can be difficult to assess how students in general are changing over time and how teachers are responding pedagogically.

One example of this kind of change involves the pervasive use of cell phones, iPads, and laptops, and the resulting effects on student behavior and learning. In the pilot study, the foundations instructors described student distraction by personal

devices as an issue that resulted in changes to the established classroom policies, which sometimes led to confrontations.

*They're pretty hooked on the gadgets and I think all of us in the college have this problem where we have to confiscate stuff all the time. "Leave your phone. Leave your iPod, whatever it is, at the door. Switch it off. Take those headphones out of your ears." And as soon as they get a break, they're on the screen. That's the world we live in. I don't want to have a Luddite point of view and say that it's bad, but it's hard not to when you see the effects: students come in for a hands-on traditional art class and they're frustrated, or they don't want to learn about materials—their sense of hands-on interaction with physical materials has been a little bit numbed. I'm extremely disturbed by that change.* (Roger)

As a high school art teacher, I observed an increasing number of students struggle to focus and concentrate on tasks, and a growing dependence on computer searches for generating ideas and finding images to appropriate for art projects. As a researcher, I was curious if instructors in foundations art programs were encountering similar issues to those I had observed in my high school classroom. Clearly, they were.

*Yeah, it's changed. It's disturbing how much it's changed... It's a double-edged sword, the whole digital world. And we are seeing very clearly*

*students who do not want to be challenged. They have no idea of what researching means. They don't want to try something more than once. They want an easy quick answer. They only see the need to pursue one solution and that's it and they're done. Their attention span is significantly shorter. Their handwriting skills have gone rapidly downhill, they don't write anymore by hand, not much.* (Roger)

Many foundations programs are themselves in a state of perpetual transition driven by changes in faculty, facilities and available technologies, and the changing needs of incoming students. These programs are also subject to administrative pressures to justify course content within the larger curricula of their departments. Complicating this further, fine arts education is a discipline with no universally accepted curriculum or pedagogy, and where large numbers of instructors at the college level are contingent lecturers, adjuncts, or graduate students. Foundations programs are often the site of tensions between (traditional) notions of “technical mastery” espoused by older, experienced faculty who teach upper-level courses in specific art disciplines and the (less-traditional) “material and experiential explorations” and “exposure to concepts and ideas,” espoused by younger foundations faculty who may see their role as primarily helping high school students transform into culturally savvy, functional college art students.

*I mean, honestly, that's how I see foundations... our whole job is to open their minds to every possibility, every way of thinking that we can, and get rid of all the crap that's come before somehow.*

*(Laughter) And go: "Yeah, well, that's not how it is here. Here's what it is here." And just:*

*"Open, open, open, open, think, think, think. Be creative"... "How are you going to solve it?"... "I don't know the answer. Do you?"... "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea"... "Maybe you should push it further"... I think that's our whole job. The whole first year is to send them reeling... (Jan)*

As an art teacher in an overpopulated and understaffed high school, I saw the effects of unequal access to quality secondary art education whenever I attended college portfolio review days. I knew that many of my passionate but underprivileged students lacked the family resources to attend museums and supplemental art programs that could lead to portfolios that generate scholarship admission to selective art colleges. This disparity was made worse during the recent recession when widespread cutbacks were made to K-12 arts instruction that have yet to be reinstated in many districts.<sup>17</sup> When my own tenured position was eliminated in 2010, just two full-time high school art teachers were left to service over 800 students.

Beyond these cutbacks, assessment-driven mandates have altered the very nature of secondary art education, resulting in art lessons that include academic components and “testable” content.<sup>18</sup> Federal education reforms, such as *No Child Left Behind* and the *Race to the Top* initiative, have led to a pervasive “teach to the test” mentality throughout K-12 education, as art teachers, in some cases, have face evaluations based on their students’ performance on academic subject tests.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the competitive nature of college admissions has led some students to focus on grades and



Pilot studies provide an opportunity to try out interview questions and the overall research design before launching a larger study. I sought participants who could provide rich information about foundations teaching, so I reached out to...mid-career professors...

extracurricular activities rather than to cultivate personal interests. Given the focus on assessment in K-12 education, it is not surprising that researchers suggest there has been a significant decline in creative thinking among young people in the United States recent years.<sup>20</sup>

*I gave them this very open-ended project where they had to make a lot of the decisions, and a lot of them were asking, “Well, what do you want?”...I wanted them to be creative and make the decisions themselves and learn how to start making decisions that an artist has to make. And one girl just blurted out...“I just want you to tell me what to do!” (Laughs) And she was a really good student, but she was so frustrated because she really just wanted to follow directions. And these are the kind of students that I feel we’re getting now and I largely blame the public school system. I think it’s turned into a kind of a factory of just conformity and teaching people how to follow direction. (Peter)*

I designed this pilot study to explore the present state of first year art education and to test my own perceptions about students. Pilot studies provide an opportunity to try out interview questions and the overall research design before launching a larger study. I sought participants who could provide rich information about foundations teaching, so I reached out to some of the mid-career professors in the two foundations programs where I had previously taught, and six agreed to participate. These included “Tracy” and “Roger” from a local community

college, and “Ryan,” “Alex,” “Jan,” and “Peter,” who teach at a selective state liberal arts college. All were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality. These instructors were asked about their personal art practice, educational backgrounds, how they got involved with teaching, how they have seen foundations students change over time in terms of their art skills and dispositions, and how their own teaching has changed.

Upon close reading of the six interview transcripts, themes, or codes, emerged. This coding allowed me to highlight similarities and differences between the participants’ responses, the kind of courses, and the institutions where they teach. I found a correspondence between the faculty’s perceptions about students and their perceptions about teaching, which suggests that these instructors are consciously responding to their perceptions of students’ characteristics through their teaching. For instance, when one instructor observed that students entered college with poor manual skills, he created a project that required extensive and precise paper cutting. On its face, this finding seems obvious, but when I was an undergraduate, the students who struggled to develop the necessary skills often failed because higher education, at that time, was commonly a content-driven, teacher-centered endeavor. Many college instructors today no longer see their role as the expert “sage on the stage” and prefer to see teaching as an exchange of ideas or a collaborative creative journey to be taken with students.<sup>21</sup>

While college art faculty may see widely ranging skills, dispositions, and art experiences among their incoming students, the assumption remains that lack of skills and inexperience can be overcome through hard work and determination in foundations courses. Some participants described having students today who approach assignments and skill acquisition with a “checklist” or “one-and-done” mentality, and who are resistant to experimentation or reworking ideas. In response, the faculty reported teaching

students to slow down and enjoy the deliberative process of creative production, to explore ideas by working in series and through iterations, and to see failure as part of the creative process.

*I think that students are very savvy with technology, sometimes more than the faculty...*

*Their reliance on it at times though I think is problematic. Students will almost always default to Googling something for a specific answer or for quick information, so their ability to do much longer, sustained research that moves beyond an Internet source is... a growing problem. And also, [they struggle with] the ability to focus and have a sense of patience with an idea that isn't easily solved, or isn't solved in its first iteration... Students really want a quick answer, and I think it really is deeply embedded in how they have learned and how they have negotiated the world once they arrive at the institution where they find themselves... (Ryan)*

Many salient themes, more than can be reported here, about foundations students and teaching emerged from my analysis of these six interview transcripts. The two most prominent themes were: 1) foundations students are encountering difficulty with working and thinking independently, possibly resulting from K-12 education policies in the United States; and 2) students are experiencing significant anxiety, which, as described by the participants, may be associated with financial stress and concern for future employment, particularly among

the community college students. To address these anxieties, the community college faculty reported relating the skills being taught in class to the creative job market and bringing in working artists to tell their stories. At the state school, the anxiety seemed associated with academic pressures, the transition to campus life, and adjusting to the expectations of art school. Faculty at the state college spoke of minimizing the overall importance of the grading process for creative work and emphasizing the importance of hard work, risk taking, and experimentation, and the need to accept failure and criticism in creative problem solving.

*I personally think that students are more freaked out than ever by what they are going to do when they get out of school. I think they hear a lot on the news and they see it in the economy, they see their own struggles just trying to fill the gas tank to get to school. And they're really worried about how learning contour drawing is remotely going to apply to anything that makes them money. (Tracy)*

The faculty unanimously described having increasing numbers of students who seem unable to concentrate, become easily frustrated, and lack interpersonal communication skills. In response, the instructors have tried different ways to intervene to foster certain behaviors. For instance, some teachers required students to put their cell phones away and to work in groups on major projects to foster support, creative interaction, and communication. The foundations programs also facilitated field trips and foundations-wide collaborative projects to counteract the isolating nature of personal devices. To address frustration, students were en-

couraged to trust their intuition and to accept the creative process as unknowable in advance, and to recognize the differences between studying art in high school versus college. The cognitive dissonance experienced by students during this transformative first year of college is difficult but necessary for personal growth, and the professors understand this.

There were some notable differences in the responses from the community college and state school faculty. Some students from the state college were described as grade-obsessed and wanting explicit instructions for making or doing “what the teacher wants to get an A.” By contrast, the instructors at the community college did not perceive grades to be an issue for students. Rather, they mentioned financial concerns and the obsession with personal devices and video gaming as challenges for the community college students.

*Yes, and...what's a little bit alarming is that it's changed pretty quickly...it is [indicative of] wider cultural shifts. I think a lot of it has to do with a real emphasis, nation-wide, on testing as opposed to independent problem-solving and thinking. When I poll students, students say it pretty directly, that they are not used to being asked what they think...The vast majority of students—even if they look great on paper, they test well, they have strong grades and academic background—are very uncomfortable thinking independently. They almost always want to know what it will take to get an “A.” So they are very, very focused on the steps. And so, a lot of my projects in the first year are*

*very open-ended, do not have a lot of parameters, and expect a tremendous amount of independent thinking; students are often times very frustrated and at times angry with that kind of system.* (Ryan)

It seems that the kind of foundations courses and media these instructors teach may influence their perceptions of students and teaching. For instance, the instructors who incorporate technology (such as Adobe Photoshop and video editing programs) into their courses appreciated the facility students have with software and devices today, but criticized students' tendencies to superficially rely on program presets, such as filters and programmed sounds. Also, some faculty did not describe seeing the decline in manual skills reported by others. One professor felt that "students were not critical enough" of their digital photography and videos, while those who taught drawing perceived students as being "too critical of their efforts." Several people mentioned that many students place a higher value on learning digital skills over manual skills, while other students feel intimidated by technology and claim to be inexperienced with it, even though they use computers and devices throughout their daily lives.

One cannot make broad generalizations about foundations students and teaching based on the small number of faculty who participated in this pilot study, but these voices echo sentiments about college-level art instruction heard in many conference presentations. The value of qualitative research is to explore a topic in a controlled manner and to generate a more descriptive kind of knowledge than statistics provide. It is clear that further research is warranted if college art instructors, art departments, and colleges want to serve their students effectively.

Based on the findings of this pilot study, I have refined and expanded the research<sup>22</sup> to include 12 participants from a broad range of institutions (from community colleges to state colleges and large research universities, to private art institutes), from different geographical areas of the United States. The intent of this research is to foster dialogue among college art instructors and high school art teachers concerning how students should be prepared for collegiate art studies and what students should expect from foundations coursework. Furthermore, it suggests that changes in K-12 education in the US and the pervasive use of personal devices and digital technologies may predispose students to learning in ways that conflict with traditional foundations art study, requiring committed foundations faculty to find new ways to teach today's students.

## Endnotes

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- 22 The expanded research will be presented in 2018 in the form of a dissertation written at Columbia University Teachers College in fulfillment of an Ed.DCT, with many thanks to my sponsor, Dr. Judith Burton.

flexibility  
 innovative  
 academic freedom  
 excellence  
 learning outcomes  
 content  
 practical aspects  
 curriculum  
 interdisciplinary work  
 evaluation  
 logical minimum  
 framework  
 oversight  
 assessment  
 coordination  
 discussion

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## Prescribed Syllabi in Art Foundations: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

The prescribed syllabus is an arrangement that should be weighed very carefully. With a prescribed syllabus, all students in multiple sections of the same foundations course follow the same calendar. This paper aims to examine whether this custom, or aspects of it, should be considered as a best practice in foundations education. In the face of increased trends in both the assessment asked of a department by its own university and of national accrediting bodies, as well as in the creation of positions for Foundations Coordinators, we must be exceedingly careful that academic freedom for faculty is being preserved amidst this administrative growth and influence. Guidelines for best practices in foundations from organizations such as The College Art Association,

Foundations of Art Theory and Education, The American Association of University Professors, and The National Association of Schools for Art and Design can espouse academic freedom and yet may constrain it, as accrediting guidelines mold the structure and assessment of foundations programs. Additionally, a foundations program made and disseminated by one actor, a coordinator, without larger faculty input is also a threat to academic freedom. Healthier aspects of the prescribed syllabus would include its function in mentoring graduate teaching assistants, the united front it can present in the face of a grade dispute and the assurance that student learning outcomes are being met.

At the broadest levels, academic freedom is either lauded as an inalienable right, or left to the discretion of the departmental unit itself, leaving the less lofty and more practical aspects of foundations content, curriculum, evaluation, and oversight, to more insular bodies and further from broader recommendations for best practices. Additionally, in placing academic freedom in the lap of “units,” or departments that are more and more frequently being subdivided into a Foundations Area with a committee headed by a coordinator, issues of academic freedom become less philosophical and more practical. As a consequence of this subdivision, the larger “unit,” or department, becomes less in touch with many aspects of foundations curricula, moving it further from shared governance. To complicate matters, we cannot assume all units are created equal. Departments, with their unique structures, their personal dynamics, their reliance or lack of reliance on temporary or graduate teaching assistants, and their size (just to name a few) make the safe balance of agreed upon student learning outcomes for foundations and the freedom in the execution of teaching those SLOs more precarious.

To stop this distancing effect, the entire faculty need to be fully invested in decisions regarding their foundations program, regardless of whether they have a Foundations Coordinator or not. Curricula of foundational study should be shared, discussed and vetted by the faculty at large so that no one person or small group of people is driving such important decisions. If not, faculty may begin to adopt a more compartmentalized/complacent attitude of: “Thank goodness someone else is managing all that,” and begin to lose sight of how important their input is to what has become the *common core* of *visual arts studies*.

Additionally, less input would only serve to narrow the focus of any program. In a time in when so much emphasis is put on expanding the fields of the traditional and on cross and inter-disciplinary work,

how would a narrowly focused program serve our students in today’s art world? Or even at the next level of their education? It simply would not. If a department has hired a Foundations Coordinator to take on the duties of curriculum planning, faculty “buy in” to engage in this process may be a struggle. It should not be. Let it be the job of the coordinator to bring succinct, clear plans for foundations curricula to the larger faculty for discussion. Higher division faculty will soon have foundations students in their courses and their foundational education will impact all of their upper level classes. How could they not have a vested interest in this? In many institutions, some tenured faculty may teach partly in foundations and will care deeply about not only the curriculum of said courses, but of their academic freedom to teach them as well.

The genesis of this paper was to explore the stance on academic freedom, in particular, from national governing and advisory bodies like the AAUP, NASAD, the College Art Association, and FATE. The following is the AAUP’s statement “Freedom To Teach”:

*The freedom to teach includes the right of the faculty to select the materials, determine the approach to the subject, make the assignments, and assess student academic performance in teaching activities for which faculty members are individually responsible, without having their decisions subject to the veto of a department chair, dean, or other administrative officer.*

It continues:

*In a multisection course taught by several faculty members, responsibility is often shared among the*

*instructors for identifying the texts to be assigned to students. Common course syllabi and examinations are also typical but should not be imposed by departmental or administrative fiat.<sup>1</sup>*

*Nor, one could add, by the Foundations Committee or by its Coordinator.* That would constitute an “administrative fiat.” As reported in her article: “*Freedom to Teach*,” for Inside Higher Ed by Colleen Flaherty on November 8, 2013, a change was made in the AAUP’s statement “Freedom To Teach.” The AAUP laid out a new statement regarding academic freedom in courses with more than one section, amending the last paragraph in its statement to read:

*When it comes to course content, individual instructors—including adjuncts—should call the shots, even in multisection courses. In a multisection course taught by several faculty members, responsibility is often shared among the instructors for identifying the texts to be assigned to students. Common course syllabi and examinations are also typical but should not be imposed by departmental or administrative fiat.<sup>2</sup>*

If it was unclear that “faculty” in the original statement meant an individual or a group, for example a Foundations Curriculum Committee, the amendment makes clear that individual faculty have the right to “call the shots” in courses with multiple sections, which is so often the case in Foundations. The above clarification is increasingly important as tenure track positions are declining and dependence on temporary and adjunct faculty increases. The following is the position of the College Art Association:



...standards are described as a “framework of basic commonalities.” A framework, by definition is loose and broad, rather than specific...noteworthy is the phrase “wide latitude for creativity of faculty, students, and institutions.” Notice that faculty are listed first, and institutions last.

*CAA does not intend to impose a uniform pattern on undergraduate institutions, since a healthy, varied curriculum enriches a field that would stultify if unduly restricted. An institution’s objectives, patterns of requirements, and options should be clearly formulated and published, so students planning to enroll will fully understand what the program they are considering expects from them. The standards set forth herein and the standards published in Handbook 2010–11 by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) represent a logical minimum for faculty to maintain quality and should be surpassed in order to foster continuing excellence.*<sup>3</sup>

What is of particular interest here is the statement “logical minimum,” which can be read as basic agreed upon student learning outcomes. It is clear, that in order to surpass this minimum, a program must be varied and not driven by a uniform pattern. What is not explicitly said, but implied, is that academic freedom for individual faculty in that department is essential to “foster continuing excellence.” Here is a similar statement from The National Association for Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) from Section **M: Flexibility and Innovation** of the NASAD Handbook:

**M. Flexibility and Innovation** (*policies that establish a conceptual framework or guidelines for the application of curricular standards*)

1. NASAD standards constitute a framework of basic commonalities that provides wide latitude for the creativity of faculty, students, and institutions.

2. There are many ways to achieve excellence. Innovative and carefully planned experimentation is encouraged. Experimentation might lead to programs of study not specifically indicated in Sections IV. through XIX.
3. Failure to follow the specific approaches indicated or implied by a standard will not necessarily preclude accreditation; however, if deviations exist, the institution must provide an acceptable rationale documenting how functions required by the standard are being fulfilled, or how required competencies are being developed.<sup>4</sup>

Note that standards are described as a “framework of basic commonalities.” A framework, by definition is loose and broad, rather than specific. Also noteworthy is the phrase “wide latitude for creativity of faculty, students, and institutions.” Notice that faculty are listed first, and institutions last. In short, this excerpt prescribes experimentation and innovation as long as agreed upon student learning outcome standards are met, rather than describing how they *should* be met. The only constraint here is that if deviation from a standard occurs, the institution must put forth a rationale on how the standard is being fulfilled. The language, however, is so vague it raises a question: is the rationale a hoop to jump through on the path of the unbridled academic freedom that NASAD espouses above, or is it a complete roadblock to reasonable alternatives for meeting “required competencies”?

FATE does not have a specific stance on academic freedom within foundations programs. When asked, Vice President of Communication, Stacy Isenbarger responded with the following:

*We do not take a stance on this particular aspect (or at least not heavily) and my instinct to why is because program types vary and therefore their*

*requirements for assignment, experience of educators, etc. warrant different approaches. For instance, a program with various graduate instructors teaching for the first time may choose a more unified curriculum and a program with experienced educators may not due to their wealth of individual teaching pedagogy and reliability in the service of shared objectives.*<sup>5</sup>

It is here we find perhaps the best use of the prescribed syllabus: *amongst a cohort of graduate teaching assistants*. As they do not yet know how to build a syllabus nor what is appropriate to teach, reliance on anything but prescribed curricula developed by their department or Foundations Coordinator would be irresponsible. This assures that SLOs are being met, standards are maintained (as graduate students are still learning what standards are) and protects the GTAs, department and the university in the event of a grade dispute. If, however, for ease and practicality, all foundations instructors were forced to teach the same curriculum, this would be a gross violation academic freedom. One that would stand in stark contrast to the following from a FATE Ad Hoc Committee created and approved in 2007.

A FATE Ad Hoc Committee created in 2007, provides the following guidelines:

#### G. Content Support

1. Foundations programming should be designed to compliment and reinforce various components by providing a conceptual framework that can move across studio disciplines in the application of foundational principles, concepts, and skills.

2. All sections of the same course should cover the same basic material with agreed upon minimum requirements (which may include NASAD competencies).
3. Since visual organization is both perceptually and culturally driven, and foundations courses are ever changing, flexibility should be at the heart of foundations.
4. Foundations content should present a balance between formal skill development and conceptual development. It should give a working knowledge of the inter-dependent relationship between content/context(s), various media, basic technical processes and skills, and the structural and material aspects of art making or design production.
5. It is advisable that an inclusive, participatory, and fair mechanism for content change be established and *shared among faculty and administration*. Consider starting within an existing structure, make arguments for change in language that can be easily understood, while demonstrating the value of foundations content change.<sup>6</sup>

Of particular note is the language, or lack of language used in the second point. Nowhere does it say that “covering the same basic material with agreed upon minimum requirements” is the purview of anyone but that of the instructor as they work toward goals “shared among faculty and administration,” not *prescribed* by faculty and administration. The further we get from our national advisory, and accrediting institutions and the closer we get to the “art and design unit,” the vaguer these stances on academic freedom become. One, however, can follow the logic downward. The AAUP says individual instructors “call the shots,” CAA does not prescribe a uniform

pattern on an institution, NASAD promotes the idea that there are many ways to achieve excellence through innovation and flexibility and FATE’s Ad Hoc Committee suggests that agreed upon outcomes can be met in many ways. These examples beg the question, why would any department in any university impose prescribed assignments that follow a prescribed calendar for courses of multiple sections on their Foundations Program to anyone besides graduate TAs? The answer is simple: it is easier. Doing things simply because they are easier seems in direct contravention to the term ‘best practices.’

Assessment in particular is cleaner if all students are being evaluated on the same artifact. Proponents of assessment would prefer this artifact to be made under the same conditions. In the case of the visual arts, this might mean using the same materials, the same in-class time given to an assignment and ensuring that students follow the same instructions. In short, students would all create the same product. Assessment in foundations could, or in some cases already has, started down the road of a *visual art equivalent of standardized testing* and therefore, its teachers, are teaching to the test. Arguably, of any discipline, because of its subjectivity, visual art may be the hardest to assess. Perhaps it for this reason that accrediting bodies and regional and national oversight boards are willing to leave the grizzly negotiations of just how to assess them to the departmental unit or Foundations Committee or Coordinator. While assessment of the same product is going to be par for the course in any singularly offered course, to evaluate students on the same product across multiple sections of courses is an encroachment on an individual instructor’s academic freedom. If a faculty member enjoys unlimited academic freedom already, it forces them to deviate from their preferred assignments and timeline. If such an assessment tool must be used, it should be developed through the consensus of all



faculty teaching multiple courses, to preserve academic freedom.

Beyond the problems that assessment brings, a prescribed curriculum seems to be an enticing was to solve grade disputes that involve faculty of all ranks. It offers a united front of sorts. Disputes might be more easily settled if prescribed assignments are being used throughout the curriculum. A Foundations Coordinator or Chair will have a very thorough understanding of each individual project; it's rubric and results. The argument for ease in grading disputes, however, assumes that Foundations Coordinators and Chairs in departments with full academic freedom are incapable of evaluation without said structure. This incapacity would be patently untrue, as academic freedom is the norm for most other course offerings, whether they exist as one section or in multiples, as had been the norm before assessment. The arbiter could be provided with examples of similar assignments from within the course in question as well as be provided with the rubric used for evaluation by the instructor. It would be insulting to assume that a professional of either rank would not be able to effectively assess student work under conditions of full academic freedom.

Lastly, it does the whole university community a great disservice when they see repetitive student examples from the same curriculum. Graduate students would most benefit by seeing the multiple ways that experienced faculty with their terminal degree encourage students to solve the problem of agreed upon SLOs. They can think forward to trying out those ideas when they become faculty in their own right. Undergraduates would also see how the specifics of the design problem might be solved in various ways. It would give all members in the community of the art department an opportunity to experience difference and generate more creative thought throughout its members. It would allow faculty to teach to their strengths and for the community to learn from their mastery when working outside

the constrictions of a prescribed curriculum. This variety would boost morale and alleviate boredom for all. In a time when faculty "burn out" is often discussed, why would we let a prescribed curriculum contribute to it? The above examples ask: "should we be doing what is easiest?" A resounding no! If so, we risk the following: curtailed academic freedom for professors with a terminal degree, curriculum stagnation, student and faculty boredom and, most importantly, we miss out on modifying or introducing new assignments to achieve better student outcomes. We cease, as CAA put it, to "foster continuing excellence." Further, fixed and unchanging assignments would not reflect national trends in best practices for foundations education. To refer back to point three in the FATE Ad Hoc Committee's findings: "foundations courses are ever changing, flexibility should be at the heart of Foundations", and to NASAD's section M. Flexibility and Innovation: "There are many ways to achieve excellence. Innovative and carefully planned experimentation is encouraged."

So how do we negotiate an individual instructor's right to academic freedom and assure that our student learning outcomes are being met and that larger foundations program goals are achieved? This balance might look a couple of different ways. One, the Foundations Committee/Coordinator could be a repository of assignments to which every faculty member teaching in foundations can contribute to, or choose from and/or modify a version of. Alternatively, all assignments should be reviewed by a Foundations Committee (to which any faculty member may belong) for suitability within the program. Not, however, to prescribe assignments, but to ensure that long division is not on the menu. In sum, the functions of the coordinator, committee, or both, should be restricted to oversight and coordination without impinging on the academic freedom of an individual instructor. Ideally, the Foundations Coordinator and/or Committee would oversee the

graduate student teaching assistants in a program of prescribed syllabi not to reach beyond the GTAs. The coordinator should be a liaison between what is happening in foundations education and their department. Thanks to this relationship, a digital foundations course is fast becoming a standard. As said before, foundations curricula should be brought to the faculty as a whole for discussion and vote, as there should be no one in the department that does not have a serious vested interest in programming at this level. In sum, coordinators should both semantically AND *functionally* do just that; coordinate. And that is no small task.

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## Endnotes

- 1 American Association of University Professors, "Freedom to Teach," November 7, 2013, [https://www.aaup.org/news/statement-freedom-teach#.WnGx4a2ZO\\_s](https://www.aaup.org/news/statement-freedom-teach#.WnGx4a2ZO_s).
- 2 Flaherty, Colleen, "Freedom to Teach," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/11/08/aaup-asserts-instructors-should-control-classroom-curricular-decisions>.
- 3 College Art Association, *Standards and Guidelines*, October 23, 2011, <http://www.collegeart.org/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines/bfa>.
- 4 National Association of Schools of Art and Design, *National Association of Schools of Art and Design Handbook*. 2017-2018 (Reston, VA: NASAD, 2017): 82, <https://nasad.arts-accredit.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/12/AD-Handbook-2017-2018.pdf>.
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community  
 bridge  
 life-changing experience  
 dive in  
 physical learning  
 interaction  
 personal research  
 transform  
 quiet revolution  
 rethink  
 creative thinking  
 action  
 changing perspective  
 collaboration  
 play  
 redesign

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## 13 Radical Whispers

[A few whispers before the revolution]

Poster available online at:  
<https://michelleilluminato.com/13-radical-whispers-poster/>  
 Poster Design by James Casey, Illustrations  
 by Violet Reed.

As the entry point for higher education, first year programs are tasked with bringing students into the community as well as teaching in ways that open up possibilities for further study. How do we make that first year meaningful and provide not just a bridge to the future but a true, life-changing experience?

Many of us have responded to this question by incorporating activities such as collaboration, physical learning, interaction with the public, play, and personal research with the hope that these will encourage deep lasting experience. While these activities can transform a classroom, they may not go far enough to reset the old idea that foundations is but a bridge to where you really want to be.

We need a quiet revolution that upsets this particular viewpoint, not just for our students, but for our institutions as a whole. We need to start by asking who are we teaching? And what do they really need to learn? We need to rethink, redesign, and not just tinker with our structures to make being present in the experience of learning our first goal. We need to dive off that metaphorical bridge with our students and savor the learning that happens together in deep waters. We need to search for ways to make ourselves and our students live in the presence, and avoid yearning for the future at the expense of the moment.

Our programs are made up of different constituencies, histories, and challenges. Our differing positions allow us to affect change in varying degrees. The following points are meant to be adapted to your circumstances and to fuel creative thinking, exchange, and action. They are offered as quiet whispers that ask you to slow down, lean in, and notice, rather than as a blast of new rules to follow.

May the following thirteen whispers enter into your quiet conversations and mingle with your own thoughts as you create meaningful moments of learning for and with your students.



STOP AND ASK.

**1. Stop and Ask: What am I teaching? What do my students need to learn? Do they match up?** How do **you know** what your students **need to know**? Have you asked recently? Get to know what knowledge students bring to the classroom and find out about their passions and goals. Then, take a reading of the field—the infield, the outfield, and the stands. What is happening? What is new? What is ever important? Ask other creatives and, by all means, draw on your own experience.

Learn more about the facts. One great source is *Artists Report Back*<sup>1</sup> a national study on the lives of art graduates and working artists. It's put out by

a group of creative people who connected their own lived experiences to national trends. They question a costly educational system that does not always align with future occupation possibilities for our students and their future earnings. Using the *Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey* they looked at artists' demographics, occupations, and education. They reveal some surprising actualities. *Out of two million arts graduates nationally, only ten percent (or 200,000 people) make their primary earnings as working artists.*

Maybe more surprising is the lack of overlap between working artists and arts graduates. Only ten percent of BFA graduates become working artists. And only sixteen percent of working artists are arts graduates. Might having an arts degree make it less likely that you will become a working artist? So again, who are we educating, and what do they need to learn?

## 2. Think bigger. Find courage. Start fresh.

Using current frameworks to build new programs can allow inherent problems to go unnoticed. It can be hard for us to question our own assumptions and to notice patterns that we take for granted.

We all have heard it: "That can't be changed." "That isn't possible." "We've tried that before." Take courage. We are creative folk, we are trained to see new ways to make things better. Dismantle and build up anew. Take small generative steps, but question everything. Identify and disabuse ourselves from our own sometimes invisible limitations. Think about places where people do things differently.

Take inspiration from Professor Justin McDaniel who is teaching a new course at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. They meet once a week for seven hours. There is little speaking. They bring dinner to trade with someone in class and eat silently together. What are they doing? Reading. They read until eleven then blast into a great big



THINK BIGGER.

discussion. At midnight, they go home. There is no homework, they just return the next week to read together again. He solved a problem that he recognized—students were just not reading enough.



TEACH WHAT IS BETWEEN.

## 3. Teach what is between. Then name it.

There are many common ideas, skills, and goals for teaching first year students, but ask yourself what is



important that isn't named? What are you missing? What are you teaching that you have not verbalized? For me, teaching students to *notice* is important. Think for a moment. It is an essential skill for artists and designers. We notice. We notice our experiences, what is around us, we notice new connections and we use our work to share, comment, or evoke discussion about what we noticed. Why doesn't it appear on a list of art fundamentals?

By saying what you are doing out loud you can share what truly is happening in your classroom. Better yet, make these important points part of your creative mission statement. Once they are out there, discussed and visible, you see how they are real and important to others. Students can take hold of these lessons and understand why they are doing what they are doing. They can take up the flag!

#### 4. Forget linear. Forget consistency.

Life is organic, experiences are diverse, learning circles around and happens in patterns in ways that are different for all of us (even those who share an experience.) It is in those unwieldy relationships and repetitions that we as people understand and create new knowledge. It is messy and hard to track. Resist the pressure to provide a 'consistent' learning experience for all. Focus instead on developing a shared vision between those who are teaching. Settle on trust. If you are running a program, hire people who bring needed skills and share the vision. Then encourage everyone to teach to their strengths. As a teacher, make time to share ideas, achievements, and resources with others, especially if it is not required. Work towards that shared vision. In this model, communication is key.

#### 5. Let go.

Ok, you've heard this one before. We can't envision new ways without letting go of old familiar ones. Sometimes we just hold on way too long to our fa-



vorite ideas, methods, and modes. They become like worn security blankets that outlive their usefulness.

Cultivate an awareness in yourself for what is working and what is not working as much. Be nimble. Be willing to change midstream or make a 360 degree turn. If nimble is not your style, then prepare by building a long list of beautiful ideas, learn a new skill, or swap assignments with a friend. Remember we don't often know if an idea is a *good idea* until it is put into practice. So start big or start small. As you gather momentum, consider letting go in another way, release overflow ideas online or in your community. Then sit back and be inspired by what others created with your good ideas.

#### 6. Grading can be bad for the soul.

I admit it. That is an overstatement. But we have to wake up and pay attention to our systems for evaluating success and giving feedback to our students.

When we give a letter grade to each assignment, or every action that happens in class, we are inadvertently creating a cycle that points back to us. This cycle places importance on the outside evaluation rather than helping to develop an insightfulness into one's own learning. Do something to break that

cycle. Change the focus. If you can, don't assign letter grades at all and come up with new ways to help students understand where they are in their learning. Create process crits. Pair students to talk about the work. Invite in outside reviewers. Write secret notes. Have them collaborate. Get their work out to wider audiences. On a bus. On a billboard. Have them interview people to learn what they



think about the work. As a final, give them a chance to chart out what they learned on paper. Then spend time looking and evaluating the classes learning together. Doing this, we might learn more about our own work as well.

### 7. Quit the long syllabus. Customize Education. Surprise students.

'Not knowing' can be an important learning tool. Not knowing, causes us to focus on the now, the process, the discussion. It keeps us from jumping ahead, truncating our learning.

Find ways to respond specifically to your students and to the unique makeup of the class



community, strive to customize their education. Leave room for them to play a role in developing the structure of their own learning. Resist the day by day charts.

We ask our students to revel in the process. To not just follow their first idea and execute it. We should ask the same of ourselves. Make time to learn what this specific group needs, set up structures for listening, allow yourself to become a more responsive experience-maker and teacher.

### 8. Get rid of the desks.

Look around. How are you using the physical space of the classroom? Think about how space reinforces hierarchies, how it influences how we move or use a space, how comfortable we feel or how difficult it makes interaction. What would happen if you removed all the furniture or if you reconfigured it? What would happen if you didn't stand in the front of your classroom?

A friend recently visited Tyler School of Art, at Temple University in Philadelphia. He told me about a big open-use room that has many types of chairs that are hung upon the wall. Each of the

chairs bears the name of the place in the community who donated it. I love this idea. It allows the room to transform and cost nothing.

Change how students move in the space, have them stand or bring their chairs together in a circle. Body movement also keeps brains moving, it helps to jump start thinking and mixes students up to talk with others. It helps to make the class more inclusive and less passive.

Once you do that, look for resources beyond your classroom or off campus. Meet on a nearby rooftop, or somewhere different each week. Better yet, take inspiration from artist-professor Jon Rubin who teaches at Carnegie Mellon University. He started a real business, a waffle shop that featured a live community TV show as part of his *Art in Context* class. Place matters. Changing perspective can be a great teacher. Venture out into the world if you want students who respond to the world.



### 9. Slow down, speed up, change pace.

Model many different methods of thinking, exploring, researching, and making in class. Ponder,





**SLOW DOWN. SPEED UP.  
CHANGE PACE.**

change the pace. Fill the room with ideas fast and generate more than you can cover. Or, take inspiration from “The Line,” an Alfred Foundations course,<sup>2</sup> and send your students out to find an invisible mile-long line. Have them walk it as slowly as they can, noticing everything. Then ask them to change their perspective, to travel it with their bike, or to lay on their backs and watch the clouds above it go by. Have them describe their experience, in words, as charts, as tracings, on video, as a rap song, or a new map. Switch things up, do a Jane Fonda workout, or ask students to go interview people who live nearby.

We all learn differently and according to Howard Gardner, the best thing that we can do is to ‘pluralize our teaching’.<sup>3</sup> Providing many ways to understand important concepts, skills, or technologies will help more students to be successful.



**RISK TAKING FOR  
EVERYONE**

#### **10. Risk taking for everyone.**

We want risk takers as students. Are we taking any risks? Growth of new programs and courses need

to have room for mistakes, so that we can see the problems and make them stronger. Dive in, take a risk and reap the benefits.

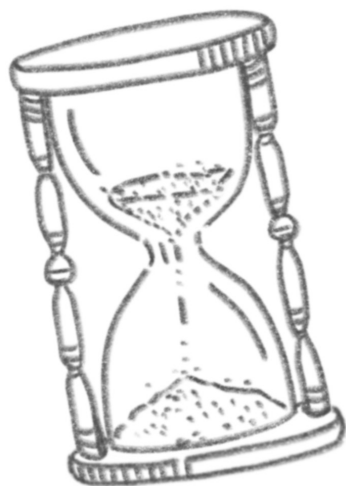


**ALLOW LIFE TO ENTER  
THE CLASSROOM**

#### **11. Allow life to enter the classroom. Keep one foot in the world.**

The world enters the classroom—politics and academics are not separate. Stand up for and celebrate diverse ideas, choices, and beliefs. Bend in places that you don’t normally bend when the times demand it. Build equality in the classroom and caring for each other. Look for ways to help students to be involved, or to lend their creative skills to issues they care about. Portland State University professor Ralph Pugay often pairs student art exhibitions with smoothie-making booths, parades, or other events that help to raise money for local organizations. These experiences draw students together and model for them ways to engage as caring citizens.

Listen, and don’t walk away from moments that scare you. You are not perfect—nobody is. But be a rock for someone. Say out loud what you are thinking, and be willing to change your mind.



## TIME-LAPSE EFFECT

### 12. Time-lapse effect. Good teaching sometimes isn't recognized in the present.

Not all students will understand your lessons in the moment. So, do what you know, be your own kind of teacher, teach for the long term. And bask in it when they return years later.



## SEEK TO CREATE PARADISE.

### 13. Seek to create paradise.

I'm inspired by bell hooks when she says, "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility."<sup>4</sup>

We each must recognize our classrooms as places of deep possibility. They can be transgressive and liberating. They can model respect for difference and inclusion. They can provide life-changing experience for our students and ourselves. They can also reach beyond the walls of our institutions and make real change happen in our communities and world. Speaking together, our individual whispers gain strength and volume that will bring us all closer to paradise.

Let the revolution begin.

### Endnotes

- 1 To learn more and download the *Artists Report Back Study* visit their site at [bfamfaphd.com](http://bfamfaphd.com).
- 2 For more information about the innovative *Studio Research: The Line* course, taught at Alfred University from 2009-2015 by Brett Hunter and M. Michelle Illuminato see <https://thelineproject.wordpress.com/>.
- 3 Valerie Strauss, "Howard Gardner: 'Multiple intelligences' are not 'learning styles,'" *The Washington Post*, Answer Sheet, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/?utm\\_term=.365dad00af1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/?utm_term=.365dad00af1), Oct. 16, 2013.
- 4 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), pg. 207.



foundations programs  
 vorkurs  
 modernism  
 bauhaus  
 fundamental principles  
 transformation  
 choices  
 student agency  
 abstraction  
 contemporary society  
 technology  
 the human condition  
 practical benefits  
 ownership  
 critical thinking  
 universal

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## Becoming Posthaus

Foundations programs have been implemented in most respected art schools and colleges around the United States. Many of these schools have a curricular model that is based on the Vorkurs course from the Bauhaus. The original spirit of the Bauhaus was rooted in modernism and filled with passion and vision. The curricular model was new, clearly designed, and integrated art, design, architecture, and craft. The pedagogical approach was based in the workshop, which included artist and craftsmen. This course was established with a belief in universal, fundamental principles of abstract visual expression. Does this curricular model meet the needs of students in the 21st-century? How does this model reflect our contem-

porary society? When adopting and maintaining a new curricular model, should we become Posthaus?

The Vorkurs was originally a unique response to a particular set of circumstances in Germany after World War I. Over time, this foundations model was adopted in the United States and codified into abstract visual fundamentals that are required in most first year programs. The principal focus of this article will be on the transformation of foundations from a set of required courses to a set of choices, allowing for increased student agency.

The term “modernism” as it applies to art is not used to describe all art of the modern period. More often the term is used as a form of value assigned to certain works.<sup>1</sup> The images many people conjure when they think of modernism are associated with abstraction and late modernism of the first half of the 20th century. Modernism is represented in many of our minds by such European luminaries as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky, and Ezra Pound. Modernism rejected the idea of realism and sought a pure art form capable of great social benefit. The Russian artist Kazimir Malevich writes in 1916, “Our world of art has become new, non-objective, pure”<sup>2</sup>—this purity was seen as a way to develop a new and better life.

After World War I, there was a trend for artists to place their art in service to social good and common cause in developing a better world. There was a strong belief that the human condition was improving with the help of technology. It was the conception of universal progress, the conviction that humanity was evolving toward a great Utopia. This was modernism’s belief, its ideal vision. Ada Louise Huxtable wrote:

*Those commonly held convictions that guide our acts and aspirations... they were based on an overriding idealism and optimism... believed devoutly in social justice, in the perfectibility of man and his world, in the good life for all. The Bauhaus taught that the machine would put beauty and utility within the reach of everyone. Le Corbusier’s Machine to Live in and Radiant Cities would transform human habitation...The arts, used properly, could bring both pleasure*

*and practical benefits to society... this was the century that equated art, technology, and virtue, and concluded that the better life, and the better world, were finally within our grasp.*<sup>3</sup>

Of particular importance to this paper is the seemingly out-sized influence of modernist artists and architects who were faculty and/or students from a small school, The Bauhaus, which was active in Germany from 1919 to 1933. It was founded by the architect Walter Gropius, whose strongly held belief that architects and artists should not just work with crafts people, but that they should be crafts people, made it famous for combining fine arts with crafts.<sup>4</sup> In the lead up to, and during, World War II, the artists associated with the Bauhaus left Europe for the United States, where many of them received teaching jobs. The influence of these architects, artists, and designers on American education cannot be underestimated.

Walter Gropius, from 1937–1952, and Marcel Breuer, from 1938–1946, taught at Harvard Graduate School of Design. Lazlo Maholy Nagy founded the New Bauhaus School in Chicago in 1937, and a year later opened the School of Design. This became the Illinois Institute of Design, which is now a part of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Werner Drewes taught at both Columbia University and Washington University in St Louis. Josef Albers went to Black Mountain College from 1933 until 1950, when he left to head the department of design at Yale University.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the Bauhaus approach to teaching and design thinking was adopted, taught, and institutionalized by colleges throughout the United States.

It has been sixty-eight years since Josef Albers began his tenure at the department of design at Yale. As a post-modern society now, how do we adapt curriculums to reflect this? Postmodern art-

ists have rejected the modernist claim to universality. Jean-Francois Lyotard attributed the emergence of postmodernism to “the suspicion of metanarratives” and the suspicion of universal guiding principles.<sup>6</sup> We must ask why we continue to model curriculum after a set of modernist principles, and if they no longer reflect contemporary society.

I would like to make the case for shifting away from the traditional foundations curriculum where all students must complete the same required courses before entering their major. How can this be accomplished when most of us have to work within very established restraints such as student expectations, faculty expertise, accreditation requirements, existing dedicated facilities, and students transferring credits from and into other colleges?

To address these questions and articulate one possible solution, I will use the specific example of the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. In 2013, I was hired as the Chair of Art Foundations, where one of my first clear tasks was to familiarize myself with the curriculum and its faculty. When I arrived, all new students were admitted as art foundations students after passing an initial portfolio review. They also had to apply with a second portfolio to their major, nine months later at the end of the foundations year. The curriculum consisted of four studio classes. “Design 1” and “Drawing 1” were taught in the fall, while “Design 2” and “Drawing 2” were taught in the spring. In addition to these studio courses, students were required to take two art history survey courses and a two-credit first year seminar course called, “Contemporary Issues in Art and Design.” There was only one full time tenured faculty in Foundations, so the curriculum was taught by full time faculty from various programs in the school. Typically, program faculty teach a foundations course once every three semesters, so it is quite

We needed to know what faculty, in the major programs, felt were the strengths of our foundations curriculum. How was the curriculum perceived in the programs of study, and what skills did students transfer into their major courses of study?

common to have faculty from Painting, Industrial Design, Art Education, and Photography, all teaching a “Design 1” or “Drawing 1” course in the same semester.

Once I gained an understanding of the current situation in foundations, I was asked to evaluate the existing program for its strengths and weaknesses. This task kept me busy. It was exciting and richly productive. I began by meeting with faculty teaching in the foundations curriculum, reviewing existing documents which laid out the mission statement and curricular goals for foundations, and researching other foundations programs at outside institutions. Some of the questions I asked were: *What was successful and working at Illinois? Did the program have weaknesses? How were other schools refashioning their foundations curriculum to meet the contemporary needs of their students? What could conceivably be implemented at the University of Illinois?*

I inherited a set of documents that laid out the mission statement and curricular goals for foundations. Both of these documents were well developed, well thought out, well intentioned, and I found myself nodding my head and agreeing as I read them. They are incredibly noble documents, and all of the items contained in them are all important things that an undergraduate student might need to have in their education...*but in nine months?* My first reaction was that the number of goals, were too broad for a nine-month curriculum. I began to wonder if there was a way to distill these ideas down to a manageable scale.

In my meetings with the faculty at the University of Illinois, I found that conversations were rich, and the faculty were invested in teaching first year courses. Given the broad scope of the foundations documents, the conversations often lost focus due to the wide range of interests and concerns that faculty faced. I needed a way to simplify the conversation, and to realistically focus on what can be accomplished in a student’s first nine months. I decided

that the most efficient way to distill our stated values was to conduct a survey. This would allow each faculty to reflect on their thoughts without the distraction of a conversation in a committee meeting or retreat setting.

In the survey, I bullet-pointed the existing curricular goals for foundations on a single page. I then asked faculty to highlight the six items from the list, which they valued the most. Fourteen surveys were distributed, eleven faculty members completed the survey, and the results are below:

- Exposure to Processes: (design, drawing, matting, video, animation, wood-working, carving, fabrication, finishing, paper manipulation, photographic documentation) 8/11
- Critical Thinking: 6/11
- Criticism and the Critique Process: (developing a verbal vocabulary) 6/11
- Investigative Process: 5/11
- Visual Organization: 4/11
- Meaning: 4/11

The results of this survey clearly reflected what the faculty teaching in foundations valued. The results were shared and subsequent follow up conversation produced a second question. If this is what we value, then what are we good at? We needed to know what faculty, in the major programs, felt were the strengths of our foundations curriculum. How was the curriculum perceived in the programs of study and what skills did students transfer into their major courses of study? To accomplish this, I used the same list and surveyed faculty who regularly taught second year courses in our various programs. I asked them to highlight six items from the list, which they felt students entering their sophomore year demonstrated most strongly when entering their programs of study. Nine surveys were distrib-

uted, seven faculty members completed the survey, and the results are below:

- Exposure to Processes: (design, drawing, matting, video, animation, wood-working, carving, fabrication, finishing, paper manipulation, photographic documentation) 4/7
- Design and Drawing Principles: (balance, symmetry/rhythm, space/perspective, sequence/time, eye movement, scale/proportion, unity/variety, composition) 4/7
- Design and Drawing Elements: (line, shape/form, pattern/texture, value/tone, color) 3/7
- Criticism and the Critique Process: (developing a verbal vocabulary) 3/7
- Problem Solving: 3/7
- Exposure to Materials: (such as paper, pen, pencil, charcoal, washes, wood, foam, plaster, metal, plastics, paint, digital media, and prints) 3/7

The results of this survey reflected what program faculty felt students exiting the foundations program were good at. It was also incredible to me that the list is nearly identical to what we value the most. The results from this second survey came back to me at the end of my first year and left me inspired, knowing that faculty were passionate about certain topics and could teach those topics incredibly well. This was the distilled list of ideas I needed to move our conversation forward next year.

At the start of the next year the faculty in the school voted to move to a direct admissions model, which would mean that students were admitted directly into a program of study. Subsequently, I was asked to join the new Ad-Hoc Direct Admissions committee and we were charged with addressing a host of issues relating to the transition and implementation of this new admissions model. As a committee, we sought and received input from a variety of sources, and found overwhelming support to

create a new curriculum that would allow students to start their major in their first year. This began a new charge for the direct admissions committee, to lay the groundwork for a new curriculum for the art foundations program. We started with several guiding principles in mind:

- Students know what they want.
- We as faculty and content experts know what they need.
- NASAD accreditation requirements.
- Current degree requirements.
- More choice and flexibility for students.

The first guiding principle on this list was a basic trust that students know what they want. I hear so often from college professors that students don't really know what they want, and I disagree. They really do know what they want. This doesn't mean, however, that after additional experiences in their major that they can't change their mind. The most consistent feedback we received from all sources was that students wanted to start their major sooner. The first step was to create a curriculum that allowed students to take a class in their major in their first year of college. Given that students know what they want, we agreed that as experienced faculty we know what they need to learn. The group of faculty that initially formed the new curriculum reflected a combined total of over 200 years of collective teaching experience at a university. In short, incoming students know what they want, and current faculty know what they need. The task was to create a curriculum that allowed both of these principles to meaningfully co-exist.

Our existing curriculum consisted of four required studio classes, and we needed to keep that curricular footprint in place to satisfy degree requirements. This meant that one of the four existing classes would be replaced by a class from

the students' major. Which class could we get rid of? If we developed a curriculum that was too novel one that abandoned the standard categories of 2D, 3D, 4D, or Drawing, then we would have designed ourselves out of the possibility of having transfer students come to the University of Illinois. This practical realization strongly guided our curriculum development decisions going forward.

The new proposed curriculum created four "menu" options using those categories: 2D, 3D, 4D, and Drawing. This new structure moved away from four required courses in foundations and toward categories allowing for student choice in each area. Students are promised a course in their major either in the fall or spring. In the other categories students may not get their first or second choice, as courses will fill up.

Students are required to take one class from each "menu" category: two classes in the fall and two classes in the spring:

<b>2D</b> 3 credit minimum	<b>3D</b> 3 credit minimum	<b>4D</b> 3 credit minimum	<b>Drawing</b> 3 credit minimum
Graphic Design	Industrial Design	Time Arts	Observational Drawing
Painting	Ceramics	Intro to Video	Analytical Drawing
Basic Photography	Jewelry/ Metals 1	Web Design	
Printmaking	Sculpture	Intro to Coding	

The new curriculum guarantees student choice and by changing from a fixed curriculum of four courses to a set of menu-based choices of fourteen courses, students are no longer faced with a required course, but required categories. The curriculum requires students to take a class in their

major program of study in their first year and allows them to try things out sooner rather than later. This choice goes a long way to create buy in with students and allows them to customize their own education. I believe it is important that students take ownership and make educated decisions based on first hand experiences. By taking a class in their major area of study in the first year they are able to make a more informed decision about the major and their subsequent course of study. If they choose to change majors, then the student's decision is informed by first-hand experience and they have not lost time on their graduation date.

One of the most significant problems in adopting a curricular model based on the Bauhaus across the United States is that the curriculum was specific to that institution. One of the first real changes educators should attempt in curriculum redesign is to acknowledge the specificity of our institutions and the needs of our students. Most of our curriculums are currently modeled around the belief that we can teach students the skills and techniques they need regardless of the context in which we find them or in the context from which they came. Not every student needs the same thing.

John Dewey's axiom, "learn by doing," was corollary to his belief that knowledge, to have real meaning, must be a way of dealing specifically with authentic stimuli and situations. "Thinking," said Dewey, "begins not with premises, but with difficulties... in what may fairly enough be called a forked road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives."<sup>7</sup> Students find themselves in the studio at night working and talking with other classmates and friends. Allowing students to have more choice in the classes they take during the day will lead to a greater variety of topics in conversations at night in the studio. This richer tapestry of experience and conversation leads to more sharing and curiosity outside of the studio. It is the sharing of information

in these casual conversations that creates the "fork in the road," and will make this new curriculum richer than anything I could plan.

One successful example of casual conversation is curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist's successful "non-conference" in Julich, Germany in the 1990's. This was an event, which had all of the trappings of a conference with no presentations. In essence, it was one long coffee break, which kept all of the interstitial spaces, the personalities, and time to converse intact. For most of us, the "Ah-Ha!" moments happen in casual conversations during a coffee break, or in the hallway, or over lunch. We know this formula works, and yet one of the mistakes I see is when foundations programs create courses that plan the "Ah-Ha!" moment for the student. Attempting to connect multiple fields together in a non-disciplinary approach often comes across as forced and unrelated to a student's interests.

Efforts to create identical course experiences for all students do not foster an environment where students come to that fork in the road, where they are presented with a dilemma, and where their choices begin to have an impact on their education. The changes that have been implemented at the University of Illinois are modest, but we are beginning to propose alternatives and create choices—we are beginning to become Posthaus.

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## Endnotes

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- 3 Irving Sandler. *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (Icon Edition ed. Westview Press, 1997), 8.
- 4 H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth Mansfield. *History of Modern Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 6th ed. 2010), 299.
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design thinking  
 innovative approaches  
 visual thinking  
 acclimate first years  
 liberal arts  
 curriculum goals  
 starting over  
 divergent thinking  
 process-based  
 convergent thinking  
 shared experiences  
 experimenting, reworking  
 peer community  
 scale, media, process  
 thematic approach  
 experiential learning

Lynn Palewicz  
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## Foundations Experience: A Team-Taught, Campus-Supported Course in Research and Exploration

As foundations programs reexamine the core curriculum of art and design study, some departments are developing seminars and shared experiences to help orient students to college life and build a community of artist peers. While these courses and experiences vary in credit hours, studio components, and cross-curricular collaborations, they share many commonalities. These include the potential to address specific gaps in foundation year education (namely, inter-school collaboration), impact the larger department and college-wide culture, and extend the learning environ-

ment beyond the classroom. As foundations programs move beyond the core, instructors need to ask *“To what extent do these seminars and shared experiences expand the foundations year skill set? What knowledge, skills, strategies and experiences are students gaining to help them succeed in post-foundations coursework?”*



Several years ago, foundations faculty at Moore College of Art & Design along with campus resource staff collaborated with liberal arts and post-foundations faculty to assess the strengths and opportunities of the first year curriculum. The program was seeking a stronger balance between fine art studio practices and technical drawing and design skills. At the same time, the faculty was looking for ways to open creative possibilities in individual course sections without compromising the curricular consistency of the core courses (2-D Design, 3-D Design, Drawing, and Color). After a few years of adjustments, faculty developed a core curriculum that preserved the technical drawing and design skills needed for artists and designers of all disciplines, and focused heavily on design thinking and generating innovative approaches within a series of set parameters (scale, media, process, etc.). Once faculty firmly grounded these core courses, they began to tackle the problem of how and where to foster creativity without a series of set parameters. This included asking questions such as:

- How and where would students learn to create and solve their own problems without being assigned specific projects?
- What opportunities would faculty have to collaborate and how could the curriculum create opportunities for students to collaborate with one another?
- How would the program include cross-curricular content or engage the liberal arts curriculum?
- Would these challenges happen in core courses or in a new course beyond the core curriculum?

Faculty answered these questions by developing *Visual Thinking*, a team-taught course in visual research and exploration.

*Visual Thinking* is now a required course for all foundations year students and scheduled for five

hours on Fridays in the fall semester. It is team taught by six to seven studio faculty members (depending on enrollment) in concert with visiting artists, designers, liberal arts faculty, and campus resource staff including the Director of the Writing Center, the Academic Advisor, and the Assistant Dean of Students. The course, currently in its third year, is structured to accomplish three goals:

1. Promote risk taking and idea generation
2. Acclimate and orient first year and transfer students to college life and Moore's resources
3. Build a strong community transcending departmental majors

#### **Goal: Promote Risk Taking and Idea Generation**

Developing the studio component required a campus effort as foundations faculty wanted a thematic approach with project topics that would pair with the liberal arts curriculum goals. The faculty settled on three themes: *Wilderness/Wildness*, *Self*, and *Advocacy*. These themes would run consecutively for five weeks each and would coincide with related content in first year writing and art history courses. For example, while students explored the theme of *Wilderness/Wildness* in *Visual Thinking* they would also be reading *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Straight and *Young Goodman Brown* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. As students researched the second theme, *Self*, they would be examining Greek Art and discussing "the ideal: then and now." In the writing course, they would be reading *Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and *Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self* by Alice Walker. The guiding force behind a thematic approach was to create a shared starting point from which students could move into related but individualized content. Themes would also provide a wide umbrella under which faculty could introduce diverse writers, artists, designers, and thinkers while still having some sense of unity.

#### **Five Week Plan**

Foundations students need a place to begin as they search for ideas and processes that they will explore for each theme. Without set parameters, students practice ways of creating their own parameters and begin to learn how to generate solutions with fewer limitations. The curriculum helps students find an entry point to navigate this challenge by creating goals for each week that require students to slowly evolve their ideas through research and experimentation. This task is not easy, and most students are quick to announce, "I totally know what I'm doing for this project!" as soon as they are given the theme. While this line of thinking is not discouraged, it can create frustrations for students later on when they discover and confront limitations (skills, time, money, resources, etc.).

#### **Week One: Inspiration and Collaborative Brainstorming**

Given that all sections of this course run at the same time on the same day, students are able to meet as a cohort. During the first week foundations students gather in the auditorium for faculty presentations on artists and designers, that work with content related to the given theme. Former first year students (now sophomores) return to share their inspirations and perspectives on the theme. During this time, it is common to have liberal arts faculty share their creative writing or invite guest presenters to share their ideas and research with students. Following these presentations, students regroup in individual sections for guided research and team brainstorming on the given theme. As students visually and verbally explore the theme, they document and compile all of their reflections into one document that is submitted at the end of each project. These documents, created in PowerPoint, Keynote, and/or Google Docs, are exported as portable digital files (PDF) and referred to as "the PDF archive" throughout the course.



The last week...is a time for sharing and reflecting on the discoveries, the learning, and the results of each student's journey...students write about each others' work, their own work, and participate in a self-assessment as well as a group critique as they finish their projects and research.

### **Week Two: Experimenting, Reworking, Starting Over**

During the second week of exploration, faculty uses prompts to emphasize divergent thinking. These prompts ask students to develop a collection of words, images, objects, and materials that relate to their concept of a given theme and help to open possibilities that will lead to unexpected outcomes. One popular solution to encourage divergent thinking is through the creativity technique SCAMPER (substitute, combine, adapt, modify/magnify, put to other uses, eliminate, rearrange/reverse). This technique, attributed to Bob Eberle,<sup>1</sup> is a tool based on the idea that innovation can be a variation of something already known. By visually answering a series of directed questions related to words from the SCAMPER acronym (How can I rearrange the elements in my sketch? What might happen if I remake this piece in three dimensions?) students inevitably arrive at new solutions. This is typically the most exciting week as the faculty is encouraging “more” and “different” results with every iteration. Judgment is discouraged; rather, students are asked to observe only and withhold statements about strengths or weaknesses for another time. The faculty emphasizes quantity over quality and as the students work, they document all of their explorations (both visually and verbally) in their PDF archive.

### **Week Three and Four: Expanding, Growing, Developing an Idea and a Direction**

The third and fourth weeks introduce students to convergent thinking as faculty work together to help students identify materials and skills reasonably acquired in a short time frame to best execute their strongest idea. These two weeks are when the program takes advantage of the team-taught nature of the course to get students working with instructors from other sections. Students can benefit from the knowledge and experience of more than one instructor as they work to realize their ideas.

Ambitious projects that would exceed a short time frame are solved by maquette solutions, models and/or refined sketches. As students work, they photograph their progress and record all steps in their PDF archive.

### **Week Five: Presenting, Reflecting, Assessing, and Sharing**

The last week of the project is a time for sharing and reflecting on the discoveries, the learning, and the results of each student's journey. During this week, students write about each others' work, their own work, and participate in a self-assessment as well as a group critique as they finish their projects and research. The conversations and reflections are sometimes in response to prompts or directed questions, while others flow freely with little or no faculty contribution.

With each subsequent five-week project, the faculty has the opportunity to help students vary, expand, and challenge their newly developed approaches to idea generation. At the end of the course, students are asked to reflect on commonalities and differences between their approaches to solving all three project themes. Upon reflection, many students are able to identify weaknesses in using the same approach for two project themes and are thus inspired to approach the last project theme in a new or deeper way.

### **Goal: Orient Students to College Life and Campus Resources**

Moore College of Art & Design, like many BFA programs, draws primarily from high schools with varying focus on college preparation. As such, students benefit from receiving an in-depth orientation to college life which includes an introduction to many of the on-campus and off-campus resources available to them. Working alongside the studio component of *Visual Thinking* is a campus-supported initiative that specifically addresses this goal.

Faculty and staff collaborate to embed a variety of workshops on college life and campus resources into the studio day and to pair them with related course content. By including these workshops into the coursework (as opposed to separate events that students may or may not attend), faculty ensures that all students are aware of their resources and that they know how and where to find assistance to help them succeed in college. Although instructors have yet to track this issue, they believe that increasing efforts to help students orient to college life will help with retention. When students are able to identify and independently use these resources, they are better prepared to be self-reliant when tackling creative, technical, personal, and professional challenges.

Moore's library staff is one of the most invested collaborators working to create a culture of writing and research among foundations year students. Eighty percent of student research for each project must be sourced from books, periodicals, films, galleries, museums, and/or one-on-one interviews. The faculty has found that without these parameters, students rely too heavily on social media and search engine results to guide their research. Library staff meets with students for each project and introduces them to new ways of using databases and the college collection. While students are required to cite all sources, there is no prescribed format or citation style guide, as the goal is to help them create a habit of citation.

As students collect and read their sources, faculty and staff from the Writing Center help them distill their findings into relevant support materials for their creative work. For example, the faculty help students understand that research has different purposes, and can be used to discover everything from historical information to a new process or material. Additionally, it is common for faculty to guide students into lab-like experimentations or self-generated interviews. For example, a student

seeking to make work about family lineage may choose to include a phone interview with a grandparent. As another example, a fashion student who was inspired by this approach to research wore her boyfriend's clothes for 24 hours to help her design a line of unisex clothing for her project on Self. Her research took the form of a list of outfits she wore and her observations about the convenience of wearing each article of clothing.

In addition to library research, the faculty collaborates with off-campus partners to foster research through field trips to local museums and screenings of films. Students screen films from the *Representation Project*<sup>2</sup> as part of the research for SELF. They watch, discuss, and respond to *Miss Representation*<sup>3</sup> and *The mask you live in*<sup>4</sup> as a way to experience and practice critical analysis given that both of these films examine ways contemporary media shapes identity. Faculty stress to students that while their reflections on these visits or films may not relate directly to the topic they explore within a given theme, the thinking expands their understanding of the projects and ultimately informs how they see their work and the work of their peers. Students document responses in their PDF archives.

The office of Student Services is also a campus resource partner in the curriculum for this course. Their staff presents on a variety of topics to supplement academic learning goals, and to meet federal education requirements not always covered in orientation. For example, discussions and presentations about diversity and resiliency may connect with research for *Self*, while presentations on leadership and *Title IX*<sup>5</sup> might supplement discussions happening during *Advocacy*. During discussions about *Wilderness/Wildness*, students discuss exploration of the urban area (the city of Philadelphia) and Student Services staff teaches them how to navigate the public transit system. Other topics such as financial literacy, networking, and academic advising are thematic outliers but play key roles in acclimating students to campus resources and college life.

### Goal: Build a Strong Community Transcending Departmental Majors

All of these learning opportunities help foster a strong student community that will last beyond this shared experience. By addressing students as a cohort and purposely breaking the rigidity of class sections, faculty hope to bring students together in new and evolving groups. By discussing liberal arts content in *Visual Thinking* and vice versa, instructors hope to show students that cross-curricular collaborations enhance learning across all of their coursework. Additionally, the faculty works to connect foundations year students with students in sophomore through senior year. At the end of each project, the faculty invites the sophomore cohort to attend an open studio tour of the *Visual Thinking* projects for each theme. Many of the first year students have already met some of these sophomores during introduction presentations for each theme. While this open studio is not a formalized event, it is popular and has had the effect of building connections between first year and second year students.

To demonstrate how the college is truly an interconnected nest of majors, instructors in *Visual Thinking* invite departmental faculty to present their work. Foundations also encourages faculty teaching in various disciplines to invite foundations year students to attend workshops or presentations that may relate to a *Visual Thinking* project theme. This strategy emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to idea generation and helps to breakdown the silo-ing of majors. The faculty has found that this approach also helps dissolve perceived boundaries between foundations faculty and non-foundations faculty. One popular event Foundations holds each fall is *Meet Your Major, Match Your Minor* where first year students gather to meet departmental faculty and begin conversations about their future academic plans and possibilities. This event is held during the lunch period on a Friday, which guarantees that all foundations students will be on campus to participate.

An initial review...showed that *Visual Thinking* had positively influenced the student notion of research... some students felt limited by their *Visual Thinking* work and did not want the disciplines to cross.... The faculty hopes to address these challenges by introducing and discussing the research paper while students are still in *Visual Thinking*.

By increasing accessibility, students can easily approach a non-foundations faculty for feedback or advising.

After this course, students choose a first year elective in their major to take in the spring. Many students draw upon experiences in their first year as they choose a major. Instructors assist in advising undecided students about which majors may be a good fit based on interests they showed in course-work. Students also enroll in a writing course where they extend a research topic pursued in *Visual Thinking* to develop a fifteen-page research paper. One student used her *Wilderness/Wildness* research on the dangers of humans taming nature to write a research paper that examined the dangers of the public education system “taming” children’s behavior and their creative impulses for self-expression through movement and language.

An initial review of this component showed that *Visual Thinking* had positively influenced the student notion of research and evolved ideas about research that students adopted in high school. Another observation was that some students felt limited by their *Visual Thinking* work and did not want the disciplines to cross. These students often had prescribed ideas of research papers and were resistant to inquiry-based research. The faculty hopes to address these challenges by introducing and discussing the research paper while students are still in *Visual Thinking*. Studio faculty will also use prompts to help students create “questions for further research” at the end of each project in hopes that liberal arts faculty will have a clearer starting point for the link to the research paper.

### Assessment and Findings

Assessment in courses like *Visual Thinking* presents unique challenges both at the student level and at the course level. Since much of the learning is process based and experiential, it is imperative that faculty find ways to document progress and

to provide opportunities for faculty (and students) to reflect on each student’s journey. At the student level, instructors use one rubric for all projects that focuses heavily on the PDF archive (approximately 75%) and less so on the finished project (25%). This focus on process rather than product allows student engagement, risk taking, follow-through, and growth to be assessed independently of a technically strong, finished piece. Before sharing grading results with students, the faculty meets to share PDF archive examples of A work, C work, and low-quality work. This step ensures consistency in application of the rubric, and gives faculty multiple times a semester to confer with students about their strengths and weaknesses, and how these variables affect grading. By focusing on idea generation, student engagement, and risk taking as it applies to growth, it is possible for a student with a strong final outcome to earn a lower grade because their research or effort was less of a priority for them than their final product. Conversely, a student who takes many risks and works very hard is able to earn a higher grade even if the final project is technically unsuccessful. The PDF archive has proven to be an invaluable resource to examine individual student growth. In addition, it is also an effective way to monitor attendance at campus resource workshops while helping students understand the meaningful place these workshops hold within the context of the course and their college life.

By using the shared rubric and taking advantage of the team-taught nature of this course, the faculty has the opportunity to reflect on the course’s successes and areas for growth during class time. In the second year of teaching this course, faculty identified several opportunities for improvement. The first opportunity was noted when students relied heavily on the skill sets they had when they entered college. For example, a student may have had a terrific idea that would lend itself to a new skill (like wire armature), but was hesitant to take on the additional burden of teaching themselves the

new skill. Given the short turn around for these projects, the students had a valid concern. One way that instructors have addressed this limitation is to provide several skill-building workshops that students rotate through over the course of the semester. They can sign up for the workshop of their choosing, and work with a new faculty member to develop a skill. These workshops take place during class time and typically include: working large scale two-dimensionally; building an armature; creating *papier-mâché*; and general information on working with adhesives. This series of skill building workshops has improved the craft of the work, diversified the outcomes, and helped strengthen the sense of community and collaborative nature of the course.

The second opportunity for growth revolved around student valuing of Student Services led workshops. While the faculty has successfully oriented students to college life and campus resources, some students did not value the workshops led by staff and regarded them as unwelcome requirements that took away from studio time. Originally, faculty addressed this issue with required written reflections, but that only prevented students from skipping the required sessions (and did not improve perceived value). This year, faculty will co-present with staff members giving workshops. The intention is for students to see that the instructors invest in the content, therefore the content is important and valuable. It remains to be seen if this approach helps the issue and/or creates new challenges.

In conclusion, the faculty has found that *Visual Thinking* builds a strong community of first year students that extends into the spring semester, studio courses, and beyond. Evidence of this ripple effect success is shared by the instructors who have noticed students helping each other apply knowledge learned in *Visual Thinking* to other course work (2-D Design, 3-D Design, Drawing, and Color). The plan is to continue rotating students into new groups, thus helping students extend beyond the

average circle of three or four people within their social sphere. This opportunity is currently realized through open studio tours, workshops, etc. Moving forward, faculty would like to develop an objective way to assess this goal.

### Preparing for the Future

As *Visual Thinking* enters its third year, faculty and administration are considering expanding it to a yearlong model. This expansion would give faculty a long-term relationship with students as they navigate their first year. While the faculty are still working on the logistics of how this longer course might run, one possibility is to offer morning and afternoon sections on Fridays. Obviously, this scheduling change will require significant campus support, a caveat of many college-wide initiatives.

Courses like *Visual Thinking*, and other shared experiences serve as an extension of orientation, build a strong community among foundations students, and have the potential to enhance academic goals by affecting the larger department and college-wide culture. After this year, all grade levels in the college will have cycled through this formative experience. As such, all faculty and campus support staff will have the opportunity to see the beneficial impact of this course throughout all levels of academic and campus life. This college-wide perspective will give foundations and non-foundations faculty the opportunity to track this culture as it enters the sophomore year, and subsequent years. The faculty is excited to see if and how these changes influence decisions to pursue a minor, choose an internship, apply for study abroad, etc. For example, with increased writing experience in the first year, students may be more likely to pursue a minor in creative writing. With more emphasis on the importance of research as an integral idea-generating tool, students may elect to pursue more courses in art history. Juniors have reported that they continue to use the idea generating strategies from *Visual Thinking* in

preparing for thesis work in their major. By establishing a departmental and college-wide culture of writing and research, idea generation through experimentation, cross-curricular collaborations, and networking among all students, *Visual Thinking* emphasizes skill sets needed for the 21st century artist and designer while also creating opportunities for students to apply technical skills and knowledge from other foundations courses to help succeed in future coursework and professional life.

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### Endnotes

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original solutions  
 document, describe, share  
 discover, probe, inform  
 fair use  
 transformative  
 remix  
 overlap, texture, scale  
 unity  
 asymmetrical balance  
 appropriate  
 yin yang, wu xing  
 balance  
 physical health  
 cyclical time  
 cultural awareness  
 hybridizing

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## Google Problems: Using Wu Xing to Guide Remix

How can foundations programs encourage students to produce innovative, ethical, and purposeful artworks in the age of appropriation and Remix? Are there ways to transform or combine existing material found on the internet into works of art that foster dialogue about fair use? As students are more inclined to source appropriated content found through Google Images than content they have created, it is important to highlight this behavior and provide a way of thinking intentionally about their practice. It is equally important to expose students to non-Western practices without a misappropriation of culture. What assignments can we create that turn these “problematic” habits into an opportunity for foundations students to learn on many different levels? This paper describes such an assignment and the conceptual complexity that underlies it.

Once a year, I co-teach a Foundations II course that focuses on helping our university’s first year cohort of art majors become more purposeful, creative, and articulate. Both my colleagues and I believe that purposefulness, creative thinking, and the ability to speak clearly about what one makes are essential for all artists, designers, educators, and historians. This is the case, regardless of the tools and materials with which our students ultimately choose to work. For that reason, the focus of our course is not on creating “great” works of art, but rather on creative strategies and research skills that will help each student find original solutions to visual problems. Along with this, we challenge the students to develop the vocabulary and presentation skills needed to document, describe, and share their artwork with others.



As the available technology for students working in the 21st century has changed, so to have the research methods and creative strategies. How many educators find their students pulling out a phone to type words into Google's search bar, once an assignment is issued, searching for images to be used as source material?<sup>1</sup> Equally, how many educators use Google to illustrate a point, demonstrate historical precedence, or make visual connections through various artworks? This ubiquitous Googling works well as a way to discover, probe, and inform. Should it not, therefore, be incorporated ethically into a creative strategy for learning?

Another question could be asked, *what about the students who have stolen or inappropriately used copyrighted material, or the students who have claimed they didn't know about fair use doctrine when making works of art?* It is a valid concern and certainly one for our times. To kick off this subject in our Foundations II class, we introduce our students to art historical examples of fair use, and the way laws have changed since the 1980's on this topic. Beginning with the case of Jeff Koons' sculpture, *String of Puppies*, produced in 1988,<sup>2</sup> we ask the students to compare it to the 1980 photograph, *Puppies*, by Art Rogers. We then introduce an audio clip from the Whitney Museum of American Art of the legal battle between Koons and Rogers.<sup>3</sup> The students spend several minutes dissecting both works of art and decide if Koons' work is too closely informed by Rogers' work of art. Accompanying our images of both works is this quote on fair use:

*The justification of the fair use doctrine turns primarily on whether, and to what extent, the challenged use is transformative: "The use must be productive and must employ the quoted matter in a different manner or for a different purpose from the original. A quotation of copyrighted*

*material that merely repackages or republishes the original is unlikely to pass the test... If, on the other hand, the secondary use adds value to the original if the quoted matter is used as raw material, transformed in the creation of new information, new aesthetics, new insights and understandings—this is the very type of activity that the fair use doctrine intends to protect for the enrichment of society."*<sup>4</sup>

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*The use must be productive and must employ the quoted matter in a different manner or for a different purpose from the original. A quotation of copyrighted material that merely repackages or republishes the original is unlikely to pass the test... If, on the other hand, the secondary use adds value to the original if the quoted matter is used as raw material, transformed in the creation of new information, new aesthetics, new insights and understandings—this is the very type of activity that the fair use doctrine intends to protect for the enrichment of society."*<sup>5</sup>

In class, it is fascinating to see the students work through this ambiguous set of rules, defining fair use and voicing their own conclusions in a group discussion. It demonstrates to them the questions they will ask as practicing artists when finding or

using images that are not their own. It also highlights to everyone in the room the difficulty of creating an original work of art without having a guiding set of practices.

It is abundantly clear that today everyone in the arts—particularly students—need to learn about the concept of fair use. In 2015, the College Art Association (CAA) published their Code of Best Practices that sought to provide guidelines for invoking fair use in using copyrighted material when teaching, when making art, and when working in a museum.<sup>6</sup> Strikingly, the concern over using copyrighted material was far-reaching. CAA reported that one in five artists, three in ten museum staff, and four in ten academics have abandoned a project for copyright reasons. This is a huge percentage of people involved in the arts who follow self-imposed restrictions and thus limit their creative thoughts, works of art, jobs opportunities, etc.—all before they even get started making or doing.

At the same time, the aesthetic practice of hybridity or "remix" has emerged as a pervasive artistic practice in a wide variety of media. In his 2008 book, *Remix*, Harvard law professor and creator of the Creative Commons, Lawrence Lessig, presented the idea of remix as a desirable strategy for creative people in the digital age. Since then, media historians and theorists have underscored the pervasive role of reuse and remix in the production of art and popular culture. In her review of Lessig's book, Melissa Scappatura observes:

*According to Lessig, current copyright laws are inadequate to protect and stimulate creative works. Copyright laws are not adequate in this technological age. Instead of adapting to the new features technology provides, copyright law remained fixated on fighting 'pirates' and has had the harsh*

Instead of adapting to the new features technology provides, copyright law remained fixated on fighting ‘pirates’ and has had the harsh consequence of criminalizing our kids. Lessig not only calls for change, but he presents the hybrid model as a means to achieve a copyright system that gives artists an incentive to create while decriminalizing the actions of our kids.

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It begs the question, *how can foundations programs encourage students to produce innovative, ethical, and purposeful artworks in the age of remix?* To create a more stable framework for our students (and frankly, ourselves) as images are culled from the web and used in an art practice, our foundations course establishes a series of steps that bypass the murkiness of fair use standards and that incorporate the use of reuse and remix as Lessig recommends.

Since our course is focused on time and the body, we have created an assignment grounded in modernist practices and non-Western concepts of the body that challenges students to think about foundational design principles, especially balance, and the ethics of appropriation. What follows is a description of the complex elements that ultimately flow together in this assignment.

Following the discussion of fair use standards in class, our students engage in a formal and iconographic analysis of Robert Rauschenberg’s *Yellow Body* from 1968 in which he transferred a series of newspaper clippings to the surface of the paper using

lighter fluid.<sup>9</sup> They are guided through the process of discovering images of iconic figures as well as objects that had relevance to the year they were plucked from magazines, and experimental art-making techniques such as screen printing and solvent transfer printing. They begin to understand some of the techniques Rauschenberg employed, including overlap, texture, scale, selective hue, asymmetrical balance, unity, and rotation.

This still leaves the question of how students can appropriate images ethically in a course that focuses on themes of time and the body. We ask the students to find and transform images ethically and then combine them with an awareness of the elements and principles of design that they learn from the example of Rauschenberg’s *Yellow Body*, and within Chinese concepts of balance, cyclical time, and physical health, specifically Yin-Yang and Wu Xing.

In Yin-Yang, the interconnectedness of all things (as illustrated in the Yin-Yang symbol) suggests that even in bad luck there is good luck, and in good luck there is bad luck. As such, Taoist philosophers believe that it is best to avoid extremes of both good luck and bad luck, and instead, to seek a simple life of balance.<sup>10</sup> A notion related to Yin and Yang is Wu Xing. Wu means “five” and Xing does not translate easily into English; perhaps the closest translation is “phases” or seasons. In Wu Xing, or Five Phases, these phases are represented by Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. In illustrations of both the Yin-Yang and Wu Xing, there is a suggested dynamic cycle of energy that flows principally from one phase to the next, and around again. This is a central concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Chinese concepts of time and the body.

Because we are using non-Western concepts of Yin-Yang and Wu Xing, it is also important to address questions that might arise related to cultural appropriation or “othering”. Given that we seek to broaden our students’ understanding of world philosophies and practices, cite all historical sources

of these practices, and aim to educate without inflicting cultural control, we set the groundwork for borrowing without misappropriating.

Additionally, though we do not directly endorse the use of Traditional Chinese medicine in our class, we find it prudent to make students aware of its guiding principles, especially since these relate to themes of time and the body as well as to the design principle of balance. Just as our students in a small, Midwestern town of 20,000 people are becoming increasingly aware of references to traditional Chinese medicine,<sup>11</sup> China has also seen an increased adoption in the 21st century of Western, science-based medicine.<sup>12</sup> It follows that this cultural awareness coupled with a remix of reclaimed imagery in our assignment offers the potential for richer class discussions on the subject of appropriation.

Once the students have grasped these concepts relating to time and the body, it is critical for us to demonstrate how to find high-quality images using an ethical approach when searching Google Images. To start, we locate a Wu Xing Chinese medicine chart on Wikipedia.<sup>13</sup> From this chart, the students select two words from each category of the five elements, giving them a total of ten words that are philosophically connected. For example, from the “Fire” column, they might choose “middle finger,” and “sweat.” These words are used as the basis for the search terms they type into Google. We then spend time showing the students how to work with images and set parameters for their searches. They select only images that are “labeled for noncommercial reuse with modification,” and save the URL of the images. They then print three copies of each image in reverse in three different sizes—small, medium, and large—using an old LaserJet printer. In one short period, the students have learned to safely find and appropriate imagery with ties to overarching themes.

We substitute CitraSolv transfer in place of Rauschenberg’s lighter fluid transfer technique not only because it is safer but also because we are starting with images found online rather than in magazines. CitraSolv is a food-grade oil made from orange peels. Both techniques are relatively low-tech, which is desirable since it allows students to add this technique to their repertoire without the need for elaborate tools. However, CitraSolv transfer can be used safely in almost any classroom so long as the classroom has windows and perhaps a floor fan. The only potential pitfall with the CitraSolv transfer technique is that it requires an older, inefficient LaserJet printer. The older the printer the better, because they get hotter, and the heat enables the electrically charged powdered ink to more easily transfer from one piece of paper to another.

The students then remix these images by rubbing the backs of the face-down, CitraSolv-soaked LaserJet prints onto a new piece of Stonehenge paper. We ask them to think about the dynamic relationship between the five phases in Traditional Chinese Medicine and to create a dynamic composition with a focus on elements and principles of design—with an emphasis on overlap, texture, scale, selective hue, asymmetrical balance, unity, and rotation. Our only restriction is that they can’t arrange their images in a circle. As part of the assignment, the students are required to create two versions using the same set of images, which fosters greater experimentation and technical growth.

Each semester we have given this assignment, the results have been remarkable from a foundations perspective. Though most finished pieces are visually different from one another, they all resonate through their use of color (giving us the chance to discuss complementary color schemes, analogous color schemes, and tertiary color schemes), balance and their ability to draw the viewer’s eye around the page without imitating the movement of a circle, and

their relationships between figure and ground. The students, often without prompting, invent or discover a personal theme and make connections between the images they find, which becomes engaging for the viewer. This invites a thoughtful discussion of narrative, and how an effective design complements a narrative.

Though it is our main objective to adhere to teaching the elements and principles of design, we feel strongly that it is our imperative as educators to include pathways towards creative making, and towards enhancing our students’ long-term individual art practice. The tools we give the students in this assignment are cheap, easy-to-use, nontoxic, and the artworks can be made fast enough to be critiqued in class. The students take a problem (Google) and turn it into an opportunity. They learn a little about modern art practice (Rauschenberg), non-Western concepts of the body (Yin-Yang, Wu-Xing), a low-tech printing technique (CitraSolv transfer), and the ethical appropriation of images from the Internet. Students especially come to understand the importance of transforming those images they have sourced and can confidently talk about why fair use practices are necessary. All of these lessons are critical to building a solid foundation for the rest of their lives, as they can be applied to other projects, other disciplines, and other situational experiences. It is a strategy not just for art, but for all creative pursuits. It is a foundational and ethical life strategy.



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networks  
 internet-aware students  
 connective  
 disruptive connections  
 cultural implications  
 ripping, chopping, blending  
 new forms of expression  
 modern school movement  
 active learning  
 collective reflection  
 transmission  
 social and collaborative  
 collective mapping  
 radically subversive tactics  
 group dynamics  
 collective creativity  
 liberation

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## What Might a Post-Internet Art Foundations Course Look Like?

In the early 2000s a dramatic shift in artistic practices started to occur coinciding with the advent of Web 2.0 and the emergence of social media platforms. A new generation of contemporary artists began to increasingly engage in internet-based processes that navigated the middle-ground between conceptualism in contemporary art and the focus of technology in new media art.<sup>1</sup> These practices have come to be termed post-internet, which is not necessarily considered a genre or a medium *per se*, but rather it expresses the overall condition in which artists have become immersed through such highly networked environments in the 21st century. As such, post-internet art explores modes of creative production and distribution through the internet and its effects on both online and offline culture. Artist Cory Arcangel refers

to post-internet as “art that only exists because the internet exists.”<sup>2</sup> It can be art production that is either created entirely online, or it can be produced as material work that was influenced by research on the internet. Thus, its production has broad implications for all art practices, particularly related to how artists approach conventional art mediums in this contemporary moment when the internet is no longer relegated to the realm of ‘internet culture,’ but is now referred to simply as ‘culture’. In other words, the ‘post’ of post-internet does not indicate a past, or something being ‘over’, but rather, as artist and educator Hito Steyerl exclaims, “it has gone all-out, or more precisely: it is all over!”<sup>3</sup> Most significantly within the context of art education, post-internet art describes the modes of self-learned and community-shared (or crowd-sourced)

skills, forms, and conventions utilized by artists to not only produce their work, but also to move beyond production into post-production, distribution, circulation, appropriation, mash-ups, and remixes.

This article contends that if post-internet practice in contemporary art is positioned as a primary course of learning in art foundations, our understanding of the instructor/student and individual/collective relationships in introductory art instruction could be re-evaluated and re-imagined. Taking the lead from recent pedagogical research<sup>4</sup> on the educational theories of Célestin Freinet and Félix Guattari, this article proposes a more horizontal approach to introductory art instruction that emerges from the consideration of post-internet art practices as a vital component to the advancement of first year art students. Rather than pursuing the frequent top-down instruction of concrete fundamentals rooted in 2-D and 3-D design, foundations courses based on post-internet art practices could productively subvert the instructor/student hierarchy and create collective learning experiences that explore the power of what Guattari calls the “subject group.”<sup>5</sup> The implications for this proposal would require reconsideration of certain methods of teaching and learning in art foundations research, curriculum design, and the role of the post-internet condition toward transforming art education practices in the 21st century.

### A Place for Post-internet Art in Foundations

As long as the internet exists, post-internet practices are bound to continue to pervade in wider ranges throughout all realms of art. In the past ten years contemporary art has undergone dramatic shifts through the immersion of internet-based art practices and discourses through representation in major exhibitions, conferences, art magazine and journal publications, and several essay volumes<sup>6</sup>

that demonstrate the breadth of research contributed by artists, art historians, theorists, curators, and critics on the post-internet condition. It is long overdue for art education scholarship to contribute to this discourse of internet-based art production, and it is becoming more evident that foundations instructors and curriculum designers must consider the production of spaces for practices and conversations of such ‘internet-aware’ art.

Significantly, a post-internet foundations course is not intended to replace traditional foundations subjects. It would ideally be offered as a stand-alone course as a counterpart the development of traditional artistic skills and techniques, which is similar to how color theory courses are routinely offered to complement courses that teach the fundamentals of 2-D design and 3-D design. Post-internet art discussions and exercises could also be incorporated into existing foundations course curriculum, but this might pose significant challenges to instructors, insofar as post-internet practices have rarely been permanently fixed or stable due to their constantly evolving conventions and the speed with which such shifts emerge. The formal and conceptual topics of post-internet art practices at one moment might take on a radically different set of skills and conventions within a one or two year time frame. Instructors of these courses must account for the complexity of the formal and conceptual shifts of post-internet practices. As such, instructors cannot teach a post-internet art foundations course alone. Instead of commonly adhering to top-down instruction of the fixed attributes of traditional foundations—in which set rules, skills and conventions are passed from the teacher specialist to the student novice—the building blocks of a post-internet art foundations course will always be in flux.

Current university students tend to explore these processes as both artists and as non-art creative users of the internet, and they have been doing so from a very young age. In most cases it is these

internet-aware students who would be more likely to take on the role of ‘specialists’ (or at least co-specialists along with the instructor) in post-internet art foundations courses. While a 2-D design foundations course would teach concrete, yet vital, age-old fundamentals such as line, shape, texture, value, scale, proportion, or color, a post-internet foundations course would consist of an entirely different set of elastic formal terms, such as modulation, remixing, looping, embedding, scripting, archiving, reblogging, commenting, memes, fails, or defaults, among various additional forms and approaches that are constantly and rapidly evolving (or in some cases, just as quickly becoming outmoded).

While art education research of the past 20 years has emphasized the significance of new media, digital practices, and social media in the classroom, the technology portrayed in this scholarship has often been positioned as a platform for teachers to facilitate learning for students as a means to other ends, such as creating a more interactive educational experience. Art educators must avoid the trap of framing post-internet art as ‘tool’ to be applied only to serve other purposes in artmaking. Rather than simply taking advantage of the tools of its making, post-internet art is more intent on what art critic Paddy Johnson describes as artwork that is “created with the consciousness of networks within which it exists, from the changing nature of the image to the circulation of cultural objects, from the politics of participation to new understandings of materiality.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, a foundations course for post-internet art must consider internet-based art production on its own terms, albeit one that shifts shape, blurs boundaries, and creates productive and disruptive connections with other contemporary art practices. Nevertheless, post-internet art possesses its own rules and conventions regardless of how ambiguous and fleeting they may be.

The inherently social and collaborative nature of post-internet art practices opens the door for a new way to think about what teaching and learning could become through contemporary art education. It offers a learning model that is directed toward students who are inherently internet-aware.

### Post-internet Art and Non-Art Practices

In order to create a working plan for incorporating post-internet art into foundations curriculums, it is helpful to briefly examine the emergence of post-internet practices in mainstream contemporary art over the past ten years. Post-internet is a term coined by Marisa Olson in 2006<sup>8</sup> to describe the ways in which artists were coming together online in various forms to explore the cultural implications of a rapidly expanding internet into our everyday lives—particularly as it was becoming more mobile, faster in broadband speed, and vastly more connective through the rise of social media in the mid-2000s. What made early post-internet artists so socially engaged was their reflection of the processes of transmission both through online and offline mass culture. The internet was no longer a space for tech savvy specialists as it was in the 1990s. It had permeated everyday life by this point, and created a culture inundated with unprecedented access to information that could be rapidly consumed, produced, and distributed.

Some of the earliest forms of post-internet art in the mid-2000s were “surf clubs,” which were artist-run blogs designed for sharing a wide variety of content, regardless as to whether it was artist-generated work, manipulated content, or found online ephemera. Curators Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter describe these various internet ready-mades as “digital folk art—strange GIFs, previous eras’ web graphics, advertising or branding fails, intriguing textures or chat poetics.”<sup>9</sup> Using widely available software tools, communities of users created a strange and unique visual vocabulary of web navigation, which encouraged the sharing of images, GIFs, videos, animations, sound files, and texts that could be further appropriated, remixed, mashed-up, and incorporated into both existing and new artworks. These online social practices fostered the exchange of a multiplicity of skills and conventions that formed artistic mutations and hybrid modifi-

cations of artworks, which quickly extended to the mainstream contemporary art landscape.

Another important thread of post-internet discourse that continues today surrounds the question of how artists distinguish themselves from users who do not consider themselves artists but are nevertheless creating, re-creating, sharing, and collaborating with similar images and ephemera online. Cory Arcangel calls this the “fourteen-year-old Finnish-kid syndrome,” in which most of the creations distributed online are not produced in a contemporary art context, but rather it could be made by anyone (often of a young age) anywhere in the world.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of creative online production is made by non-artists and is never intended to be art. As such, the skills and constantly shifting conventions of creative practices and distribution online are not necessarily based in common fundamentals or even conventional sensibilities of art. Arcangel praises non-art creative production online as inspiration for contemporary artists: “I will see stuff daily and think, Oh my God, that’s the greatest thing I’ve ever seen in my life, and in an art context it could work.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, while such online forms of production, remixing, and sharing are often not intended as art, their creative processes and practices interact with and influence contemporary artists, which can in turn be built upon through similar approaches in an post-internet art foundations environment.

The inherently social and collaborative nature of post-internet art practices opens the door for a new way to think about what teaching and learning could become through contemporary art education. It offers a learning model that is directed toward students who are inherently internet-aware. In this second decade of the 21st century, all incoming first year university students are fully ‘digital natives.’ That is, they are students who have never known a time before the internet became a widely available cultural phenomenon. Educators John Palfrey and Urs Gasser stress the prevalence of creativity in the

online practices of digital natives and what non-digital natives can learn from this phenomenon: “Digital natives have developed excellent research skills when it comes to digging up digital materials that can be remixed—young people variously call it ripping, chopping, blending, mashing, or just manipulating it—to create new forms of expression.”<sup>12</sup> Beyond these adept practices of remixing, Palfrey and Gasser additionally stress the social and collaborative power of digital native practices that “happens with others and causes us to learn from others, often not in the home or the school but in networked publics online.”<sup>13</sup> Foundations in post-internet art allows for those networked publics online to cultivate spaces for these forms of creative practices and artmaking to occur *within* the school, offering the potential to create radically different teaching and learning environments that can productively and collectively subvert constraining and conforming modes of learning.

### **Pedagogical Frameworks: Freinet and Guattari**

To further explore this potential for a more horizontal mode of learning, this article will turn to the pedagogical concepts of two French theorists, Célestin Freinet and Félix Guattari, who come from very different conceptual backgrounds, but both shared radical positions toward counteracting the oppressive social effects of institutionalization. Freinet (1896-1966) was an educational philosopher and teacher who envisioned an open system mode of schooling, founding what is known today as the Modern School Movement.<sup>14</sup> Its purpose is to democratize the classroom through student-determined curriculum and place a strong emphasis on group learning. For Freinet, the teacher’s role is not as a voice of unquestioned authority, but rather as a minimal facilitator and fellow participant of the class as a social group.<sup>15</sup>

Assignments in Modern School programs are determined by students’ interests and carried out

in a space that cultivates social engagement in the classroom. This active learning environment extends into everyday life and is intended to facilitate connective encounters in the world. The first activity in a Modern School program often takes form as a “class walk,” in which students get out of the classroom and into the surrounding neighborhoods of the school to engage with communities and explore the local natural and built environment.<sup>16</sup>

Upon returning to the classroom the students write about their experiences. To Freinet, writing is never simply a silent, individual task. Reading and writing in the Modern School takes place as a group activity, in which the class participates in collaborative editing through collective reflection and discussion. Students are encouraged to utilize the volumes of group-produced journals as a replacement for instructional textbooks. Journal volumes are also exchanged with other schools to cast a wider net of collaboration and learning with students from different geographical backgrounds. Through this individual and collective mapping of learning connections from geographically-diverse educational networks, Freinet’s original organization of this open system of education prefigured the invention of the internet a half century later. The driving force of Freinet’s educational philosophy is the power of creative and connective work through group-dynamics—both near and far—which, as educator Jason Wallin articulates, links “the pedagogical life to the broader social fabric, and the dehierarchization of classroom labour.”<sup>17</sup> However, this is not a complete dissolution or inverse of hierarchical structures. Wallin refers to Freinet’s curriculum organization as a “careful experiment in mixing supple and molar segments,” and as such, the pedagogical structure is still in tact, but it is more attentive to the productive and potentially liberating flows of the group-dynamic.<sup>18</sup>

Philosopher and psychotherapist Félix Guattari (1930-1992) derived his own concepts of group-

dynamics from Freinet’s pedagogy, applying them in a different kind of institutional space through his experiment (with Jean Oury) at the la Borde psychiatric clinic beginning in the 1950s. Guattari attempted to reframe the discourses and organization of the clinic by creating what he called “subject groups,” which were produced to counteract the “insidious reinjection of repressive social patterns” of the institution.<sup>19</sup> Through a radical reorganization of the roles of doctors, staff, and patients, every person in the clinic was required to take on positions that were not their designated institutional assignment or classification. Guattari described this as an “internal mini-revolution” which relocated the positionality of all participants in the clinic, such as doctors assuming a janitor’s role or patients distributing medication.<sup>20</sup> As a collective, the subject group created an integrated ‘patients club,’ organized theater productions, and produced a clinic newspaper. This institutional experiment in la Borde was aimed at what Guattari described as “the enrichment of individual and collective subjectivity and... the reconfiguration of existential territories concerning—all at once—the body, the self, living space, relation with others.”<sup>21</sup>

For Guattari, this subject group model extended to all institutions including schools, for which he determined must undergo “permanent reinvention,” perpetually shifting through “internal recreation” rather than continuing the authoritative instruction of “empty repetition.”<sup>22</sup> Similar to Freinet’s de-hierarchical classroom, Guattari’s pedagogical model did not seek to eliminate organizational roles. Instead he instilled what Wallin articulates as “cautious destratification,” in which the participants in the institution were “productively delinked from bureaucratic structure.”<sup>23</sup> Guattari built upon Freinet’s program through the self-determination of individual and collective creativity in the form of radically subversive tactics for producing liberation from within the institution.



### Six Components to what a Post-internet Art Foundations Course Might Look Like

A post-internet art foundations course serves an exemplar for experimenting with the pedagogical concepts proposed by Freinet and Guattari. Only after acquiring fixed art rudiments can the conventional foundations student advance to a level of technical and conceptual competence to subvert and play with those rules through artmaking in upper level courses. Post-internet art follows a structure that is fundamentally different—through its fluid organization of rules and conventions—than the way art foundations curriculum is often organized. This section will present the underlying components that the practice of a post-internet art foundations course could be based upon. These components are not the content of the practice, and thus they are not prescriptive. They may be flexible and adaptable to various art education environments, but as vital concepts, they serve as an open pedagogical system for a new way forward in addressing art foundations through post-internet practices.

1. *Subject Groups develop and refine a new set of fluid skills and vocabularies:* Similar to traditional foundations, the student outcome for a post-internet art foundations course is not to build a body of ‘completed’ artworks. Rather the outcome is for the student to reach a level of more complex individual and collective production of critical visual, textual, and multi-platform post-internet art vocabularies. A post-internet art foundations course relies less on the development of repetitive technical or manual skills, and more on malleable skill sets pertaining to searching, collecting, combining, modulating, collaborating, sharing, and exchanging. These skills are heavily immersed in the post-internet condition—the complex relations of social, political and material engagements that influence and determine online and offline interaction and production. Ad-

ditionally, similar to the methodology of traditional foundations, the student is expected to utilize the flexible skills and concepts of post-internet practices as they are further applied in upper-level courses in various areas of contemporary art and beyond.

2. *The instructor serves to create context, but also embraces the role of fellow participant:* Post-internet art foundations course instructors do not participate in the common top-down transfer of skills and conventions in the traditional sense of foundations art. Rather, instructors play an important role in raising critically engaging questions about online creative practices and their intricate entanglement with contemporary art and culture. Additionally, the instructor must acknowledge the advanced skills and intelligence of digital natives and their grassroots experiences as artistic and non-artistic creative explorers of the evolution and changes in online culture. A post-internet art foundations course instructor embodies Guattari’s destratification of the teacher/student hierarchy by embracing “permanent internal re-creation” as a fellow learner of the collective, which produces a horizontal re-imagining of group subjectivity in the classroom.<sup>24</sup>

3. *Collective sharing of skills and knowledge:* Post-internet practices inherently place a great emphasis on collective sharing and community. A vital component to begin a post-internet foundations course is to allow for all participants—including the instructor—to share with one another the ways in which online creativity plays a role in their lives. This is an opportunity for each participant to exchange various platforms and modes of engagement with online processes, whether for artistic practice or for non-art creative production.<sup>25</sup> This initial exercise shapes a social connection and collective understanding of the various internet practices and knowledge shared by participants of the class. Taking its lead from Guattari’s framing of the ‘subject group’, the exer-

cise creates a more horizontal organization from the outset as it allows for all participants to demonstrate skills and techniques to each other. This is in contrast to the instructor simply laying out the art rudiments for the students, which often occurs in conventional foundations courses.

*4. Creating a collectively-determined curriculum for the course:* Based on the initial collective sharing of online skills and knowledge, all participants could come together to discuss the various ways forward in constructing the curriculum for a post-internet art foundations course. This is a significant element of Freinet's program in which decisions are made democratically based on student's interests rather than what an institution or authority figure determines the students ought to learn. It similarly underscores Guattari's difference between the subversive mode of the subject groups and institutionally-determined subjugated groups. It is likely that the group will have many ideas for the direction of the course (though the instructor, as a participant, could have projects to suggest), and the question at hand would turn to how the group determines the selection and timeline of the projects throughout the semester.

*5. Reflection and contextualization take many material and experiential forms:* To Freinet, writing is both an individual and collective activity. Writing as a form of group communication—to have a voice within a group and to hear the voices of others—should be a vital component to a post-internet art foundations course. It is inherently also extended beyond written form and into the realm of emerging and fluid internet-aware vocabularies, which utilize a variety of media platforms as modes of transmission of individual and group expression. Freinet's notion of collective writing could be expanded through the various diaristic tendencies of post-internet practices, making use of individual and group desires to

work through experimentations with self-expression through various online and offline platforms of creation, sharing, and remixing.

*6. Post-internet art extends beyond the online realm:* Freinet foreshadowed the connectivity of the internet with his dedication to collectively-produced journals that were physically exchanged with other geographically diverse schools. While the ubiquitous sharing of a multiplicity of forms of internet-based content is now the norm in everyday life, not all post-internet artists are necessarily producing work that exists online. There has been a dynamic emergence of artists who work with post-internet practices that either originate from, or infiltrate other forms, mediums, and genres in the arts. Artists often alternate between online and offline production, and many seek to explore the interstices of the two realms. As a final component of what a post-internet art foundations course could look like, 'subject groups' could occupy these spaces of online/offline lived experience in many forms, particularly though collaboration with groups in other courses (in the arts and beyond) and in communities outside of the university. This extends the discourses into greater production and proliferation of group discussions and reflections, and a more complex collective mapping of sharing and knowledge. These modes of working across the instructor/student and individual/collective binaries epitomizes Freinet's reimagining of an education of collective inquiry and engagement, as well as Guattari's call to work from within the institution to subvert its stratification of hierarchies and categories of learning.

## Conclusion

Sociologist Manuel Castells cautions us about the various effects related to how the internet revolution has significantly transformed our socio-cultural landscape into a network society: "As in all mo-

ments of major technological change, people, companies, and institutions feel the depth of the change, but they are often overwhelmed by it, out of sheer ignorance of its effects."<sup>26</sup> Artists, curators and critics have been taking the lead in expressing and articulating these effects in contemporary art and culture through various visual, spatial, performative, and textual modes of inquiry. It is beyond evident that art influenced by internet-aware and social media practices is not simply a contemporary phase confined to the first two decades of the 21st century. Art educators must also address these effects by similarly recognizing that the post-internet condition is here to stay, even if its foundations are continuously in flux relative to the conventional fundamentals of 2-D design and 3-D design. The six components for a post-internet art foundations course laid out in this article can serve as flexible guidelines for foundations curriculum designers to develop the tools for adapting to the socio-cultural changes brought on by the internet revolution. For the internet-savvy foundations art student, it is counter-intuitive for the themes of post-internet practices and discourses to be postponed until a progression to upper-level special topics course offerings, particularly when these practices have rapidly proliferated throughout all realms of mainstream contemporary art in the past fifteen years. As such, it is essential for today's students and teachers to actively embrace and engage internet-based practices in contemporary art at the ground level of university art education.

## Endnotes

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- 18 Ibid.
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- 20 Ibid., p. 178
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- 24 Guattari, *Chaosophy*, p. 182
- 25 Current common platforms and forms of engagement in the United States include (but are absolutely not limited to) GIFs, animations, memes, voice memos, mp3s, videos, photos, scanning, rendering, 3-D modeling, modding, scripting, embedding, filtering, blogging, vlogging (YouTube), microblogging (Tumblr/Twitter), chatting (Omegle) live-streaming (Live.ly/Live.me), web design, paint/sketch apps, note apps, content curation tools, texting (Whatsapp/Kik), self-destructing apps (Snapchat), image and video sharing apps (Instagram), Facebook, Reddit, Google Maps, and many more to come (and many will inevitably drop off of this list).
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branding  
practical application  
visual language  
compositional concepts  
aesthetics  
branded world  
satire  
professional vector

## Book Review

### *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Entire Branding Team*, by Alina Wheeler

A pedagogical application of the designer's resource, and a case for graphic design curriculum in art foundations courses

Alina Wheeler's *Designing Brand Identity* is not a book made for teachers, but is a resource for every member of a branding team, which is exactly why it is successful in my classroom. As a teacher, I enjoy designing curriculum and do not need another prescriptive curriculum book, but appreciate this resource's succinct overviews of complex aspects of brand identity. When we add graphic design to an art foundations curriculum, we add a practical application

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of abstract compositional concepts. This provides some students new access points to evaluate the success of visuals using audience-specific visual language.

*Designing Brand Identity* has three parts, covering "the Basics," "the Process," and "The Best Practices" of designing visual identity and branding systems. Each of these parts has at least 50 spreads briefly covering core concepts of the branding process with strong visual examples, and references from applicable professionals. Each concept is explained in two facing pages utilizing ample negative space. Topics covered range from formal concerns (like "dynamic marks," "testing the effectiveness of a color strategy," and "signage") to marketing concerns (such as "conducting research," "usability testing," and "building brand champions"). Many spreads include lists of questions for designers which lead to results tailored to the project's context. While 324 pages long, the book is still a skipping stone on each part of the branding process. It gives an aerial view, and provides enough context to get designers (and students) thinking in the right direction.

My beginning graphic design students found Alina Wheeler's *Designing Brand Identity* a welcome introduction to a three-week branding project. I showed my students 25 spreads or so from the book so that we were all speaking the same language. My students immediately understand best practices of logo design with visual examples. One student

wanted to use an arbitrary shape from a prior foundations project as a logo, but after reviewing “The Basics” section of the book, realized that the shape may not be communicating the brand’s core messages. My students grew as they recognized how aesthetics communicates feelings and associative messages. They did ask for examples of poor designs, and we found the “Before and After” portion of “The Basics” section provided logos before and after a redesign. This sparked student conversations about how context affects compositional process. Once students developed their logos, we revisited the book to understand different touch points to see how the brand identity is made visible. My students used this to create “stylescapes” which are 10 x 30 inch boards artfully composed to propose a rebrand (including color, typography, copy text, associative imagery, and touch points).

As a professional creator, I now consider *Designing Brand Identity* a resource for my own work as well. Designing Brand Identity’s “Best Practices” section is especially interesting to me, as I can see 50 examples of showcased brands. The “Brand Guidelines” spread (p. 204-205) acts as a checklist in creating guidelines, so that clients do not unintentionally unravel your hard work. This “in-depth composite” is merely categorized lists, but as a practicing designer this ensures that I did not miss a step in my guidelines. Even though this resource at times feels like a checklist, it is especially helpful to get a team on the same page considering the variety of educational models for graphic designers and marketers.

I’ve taught in four different educational settings and found skill and knowledge varies greatly based on context. Some designers learned in graphic design specific programs, others had scattershot electives in a BA/BFA program, while many learned on their own through online courses or video tutorials. I found myself in graphic design out of pragmatic necessity after graduating with a degree in print-

making during the recession. While graphic design was not a part of my undergraduate or graduate curriculum, I found it a way to support my family using my fine art background while working on my MFA, and afterwards with a 5/5 teaching load. I have continued to expand my design practice over the past decade and found the bitesize information in this book a refreshing reminder on broader context, as well as an introduction to other areas of marketing. This expanded assemblage of art, design, and marketing knowledge better serves my clients and my students. With this being the fifth version of the book, including a forward by Debbie Millman, co-founder and chair of the Masters in Branding program at SVA, I’m able to trust the information is updated and has staying power.

I feel responsible to introduce my students to graphic design and other applied creative contexts that financially support creative people. The branding process has grown beyond a simple logo design for most organizations, and the largest branding contracts can earn over \$100,000. In a STEAM pressured environment, return on investment concerned students should receive at least a foundational understanding of graphic design. To deny art students an introduction to this discipline—the intersection of art and business—is an asinine and privileged approach to making. A foundations curriculum can easily be augmented to become holistic with this inclusion.

Integrating elements of graphic design into foundations projects infuses practical content into formal foundation. A logo design project can propel a foundational shape project. Readability of shape, use of negative space, and exploration of balance is immediately understood using the visual language that our students have been reading since birth. *Designing Brand Identity* gives professional examples. The logo for Action Against Hunger (p. 39 and 214) is shown using two simple leaf and droplet shapes that can be used to communicate both

access to food and lack of access to food. Mural Arts Philadelphia’s visual identity (p. 268) shows how a simple “M” shape can be altered to show the variety of artistic marks that would come from this exemplary public art program and visually exemplifies their tagline “art ignites change.” The Sydney Opera House (p.304) uses repetition in its exceedingly simple logo, but sophistication in its complex three-dimensional type so that “shifting perspectives” is visually present. Beyond giving content to shapes, more complex media-aware art projects can benefit from this additional context. An introductory printmaking project can be expanded with an understanding of the use of ephemera in a graphic design and marketing context.

These concepts can also become fodder for artists critiquing our branded world. In order to create poignant satire, one must first understand the context and language. For example, the culture jamming duo the Yes Men, who made a hoax World Trade Organization website, were invited into the boardrooms of some of the largest corporations, and used the visual language of business to bring to light the absurdity of corporate-driven, widespread social injustice.

Regardless of the professional vector of your students, I see value in adding graphic design context into an art foundations curriculum. *Designing Brand Identity* can help quickly communicate to your students or branding team, and I recommend it.

Wheeler, Alina. *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Entire Branding Team*. 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons), 2018.



achievements  
praise  
advocate for change  
self-worth  
politics of academic power  
speaking up  
personal reflection  
boundaries

## Book Review

### *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber

At first, the whole idea of this book really irritated me. *Slow Professor*...gross. I am not interested in being slow, I have things to do. I don't have time to slow down. I enjoy being busy, I am "good" at being busy. Plus, I cannot afford to slow down, because I don't have tenure.

Yet, this book kept creeping into my life. Several friends, whom I respect, were reading this book and wanted to talk about it. Even though I felt uncomfortable with the language of slowness, which I associate with laziness (the snail on the book cover was not helping), I committed to reading

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*The Slow Professor* and giving it a chance. To be perfectly honest, I was eager to confirm what I assumed, that this was a one-dimensional self-help book, out of touch with the real demands of non-tenured faculty in the academy. Instead, I discovered less a self-help book and more of an intervention, a call to action, complete with a manifesto outlining how slow professors act with deliberate purpose. I was forced to reconsider my assumptions, habits, and how I value and celebrate busyness.

My teaching career began like many, as an adjunct. At one point I taught seven courses at three different universities and community colleges. I was afraid to say no to any opportunity because I was fearful it would be my last. I had to urgently pile on the work, because this was the established model. It felt like I did not have any other options. I had bills to pay, and I did not have the time or the luxury to reflect on how this made me feel. I just needed to do it. I got used to sleeping very little and going full speed in several directions at once. I thought it was temporary. I'd spent years reacting to "forest fires", moving from one art emergency to another without taking a break. In this routine, the achievements are praised and pauses for thoughtful reflections are not, so I fiercely chased praise and put everything else on hold. I believed that things would

be different once I landed a tenure track position. Once I did, I'd somehow develop better habits, learn boundaries, say no to things, and achieve balance. I believed once I received that job and had a voice at the table, I would transform into the ideal and healthy version of myself—overnight.

Of course, this was not the case. Once I did earn a tenure-track position, I was not able to quickly change my habits, since they'd been well established and I was comfortable with them. My self-worth and value were deeply connected to being overworked and exhausted. I wore my busyness as a badge and was too ashamed to mention I was worried this pace was unsustainable. Shame encourages isolation and hiding, so I kept my head down, ignored my instincts, and became oddly comfortable with the anxiety of the routine. In higher education, it is risky to admit you are overworked. It can be even riskier, however, to ask for what you need.

There can be serious consequences in academia when voicing an opinion, especially if that opinion is not shared by your community of peers. Higher education should be a place where innovative and new ways of thinking are celebrated, and where asking tough questions about the political structure of the academy is embraced. However, when we don't ask those questions, we are often left playing by an unspoken set of rules, which many of us have given up trying to change.

Once *The Slow Professor* started unearthing personal issues of self-worth, boundaries, and the politics of academic power, I began opening up to a few of my closest professor-friends about the wonderful (yet terrible) discoveries of shame, frustration, and invisibility. I discovered they were not unique. Ambitious friends, who seemed to be handling things in a balanced and healthy manner, admitted they were getting burnt out and ready to throw in the towel. It was reassuring to not feel alone, and it became clear that talking about this was a helpful start and prompted additional questions: How can

we work effectively within the system to advocate for change? How can we be a part of the solution, rather than part of the problem?

I cannot help but frame this text within the ongoing movement of women that are refusing to be silent about their workplace experiences and are openly questioning power dynamics that have been in place for decades. In the many universities and community colleges where I have taught over the years, I have witnessed colleagues repeatedly bullied and intimidated in a variety of ways. I wish I could report that with each observation of these awful actions, that in the moment, I spoke up, but I did not. I, and we, should be better—better at speaking up, better at listening, better at being an engaged participant in our life, better at asking for help, and better vocalizing what we will and will not stand for.

The time for creating better and healthier habits has to be now—I cannot wait until I earn tenure, buy a house, or whatever that next goal looks like on the ladder. *The Slow Professor* has unexpectedly acted as a catalyst, not only for ongoing personal reflection, but as a call for urgent action—not of perfection, but moving towards realness, vulnerability, and a truer empathy in higher education.

*The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*  
by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber  
University of Toronto Press, 2016

Portrait of the artist in his studio, Culver City, California, 2018.



artist  
former scientist  
author  
beginner  
student  
philosophy  
physicist  
multi-disciplinary  
amateur  
literature  
surprise  
struggle

Enrique Martínez Celaya is an artist, author, and former scientist whose work has been exhibited and collected by major institutions around the world.

He is the Provost Professor of Humanities and Arts at the University of Southern California, a Montgomery Fellow at Dartmouth College, and a Fellow of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities. Martínez Celaya has created projects and exhibitions for the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C., and the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, Germany, among others, as well as for institutions outside of the art world, including the Berliner Philharmonie, and the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York. Work by the artist is held in public collections internationally, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Enrique Martínez Celaya was the keynote speaker at the 16th Biennial Conference, Beyond the Core, hosted by the Kansas City Art Institute in 2017. This discussion between Michael Marks and Enrique Martínez Celaya took place via email between Spring 2017 and Winter 2018, and has been edited for clarity where appropriate.

**MM:** You've been busy recently, with an exhibition at the Phillips Collection in DC, a residency at Dartmouth, and numerous other speaking engagements and exhibitions in the last year. How do these forays and commitments outside of the studio impact your work in the studio?

**EMC:** I try to incorporate most of these activities into my studio practice, or at least I want them to be in dialog with it. Each exhibition, lecture, or teaching engagement is an opportunity to consider, reconsider, and challenge what I am thinking and doing—so they always point back to the studio and the work.

**MM:** You've stated you develop bodies of work as if you are approaching them from the perspective of an amateur. It seems that we can make a connection from this thinking to the experience of the beginner, or foundations student. Why do you think this strategy is important for you, and what benefit does it offer?

**EMC:** When artists are starting out, everything is a surprise and often a struggle. Eventually, things get easier as we become familiar not only with the technical and theoretical aspects of what we are doing, but also, and maybe more importantly, with who we are in relation to the work. This awareness is productive for a while, but it tends to deteriorate into the pursuit of what is predictable and familiar. I like to resist the idea of myself as an expert, and I do it by creating work that rewards authenticity rather than expertise.

**MM:** Part of your response seems to indicate that you find that space—the space of the authentic or approaching materiality without expertise—ripe for risk and as a built-in mechanism for experimentation. Is this something you're conscious of while working, and if so, are there “markers” you've set for yourself to avoid what you've described as expertise?

**EMC:** Avoiding expertise is merely a matter of trying to be honest, though there is nothing simple about this. Most claims of expertise depend on ignoring holes and shortcomings. I prefer to dwell where I have failed or where I am incomplete, or in what I find most challenging: the near miss. This dwelling is often not conscious, but when I see myself drifting inadvertently to the familiar, it is the conscious effort to remain unknown to myself that redirects my efforts.

**MM:** You began an apprenticeship and your artistic training at the age of 12. What are your earliest artistic memories?

**EMC:** My earliest memories are of using drawing desperately to convey meaning, which I think is the seed from which art grows. Others were the letters and drawings I sent from Cuba to my father who went to Spain when I was six. My father kept these letters, and now some of them hang in my studio.

**MM:** One of the often written about characteristics of your practice is that you've moved between divisions of philosophy, literature, and the arts. I'm also thinking of your background in training as a physicist; I'm curious about how these areas or processes have influenced or continue to influence your work.

**EMC:** To be honest, I make this distinction for other people. Within myself, these disciplines are different facets of the known and the unknown, which is a whole, and I move between one and the other without being concerned for

their apparent difference. My work is not inter-disciplinary but multi-disciplinary. If on the same day I read a poem by Harry Martinson and a chapter in *Moby-Dick* and a passage by Carl Jung and look carefully at a painting by Hilma af Klint and read a few pages in my book on quantum mechanics, what I am trying to do is to understand, to recognize. If I were to really understand and recognize, work and life would not be as difficult.

**MM:** It seems that your work is deeply engaged with the functions of metaphor. Can you address the connections to writing, and how, as you've stated, that much of your painting practice is rooted in writing? It appears to play a central role in your practice.

**EMC:** While I have been thinking about the relationship between text and image for a long time, the relationship between writing and painting is getting more rather than less elusive for me. Writing is central to my practice and the work is always in dialog with the literature I admire. But I don't rely on a system of judgment or of production that connects writing and painting, nor do I rely on writing to generate content for the visual work. Instead, I use writing to clarify where I am, and from there I wrestle with reference, material, presence, and poetry, to discover paintings that seem resonant, and these often reveal metaphors.

**MM:** Do the paintings that have text written directly into them, as opposed to those without, function differently for you? Do they fulfill more of a literary or illustrative function, rather than a purely visual one?

**EMC:** Because there is always a dialog between text and images, and many of the paintings feel like poems to me, I am not sure the paintings with texts function very differently than those without. I almost always consider text part of the work, but text rarely survives. I usually paint it over. The purpose is never to illustrate, however.

**MM:** Though you work in a variety of media, do you feel more aligned with painting? Do you consider yourself a painter, first and foremost?

**EMC:** I think of myself as a painter, by which I mean I feel connected to painting as an intellectual and emotional inquiry as mapped out by those artists I admire rather than as a category of cultural production. Painting is the way I understand what art might be.

**MM:** I find it more than a little ironic the anecdotal statement that you've "abandoned" the field of science. It's as if the process for thinking—in the same way that art is an investigation—is somehow lost. The implication is that the process of creative inquiry is intrinsically different and can simply be abandoned. I was wondering if you could speak to this transition, or the problems with a perception of creative inquiry that differs from critical inquiry?

**EMC:** You are right that using the term "abandoned" in explanations about leaving science is careless. I didn't abandon physics. I carry it with me, along with the approaches, prejudices, and aspirations that are part of scientific inquiry. What I left behind are the day-to-day engagement with the processes of science and the conversation with the scientific community. I am still involved with truth, knowledge, unknowns, limitations, and so on, and I don't see any useful distinction between critical and creative inquiry—I don't know where to draw the line between them.

**MM:** As you are aware, a current area of discussion in arts education is how it is evolving and changing to reflect 21st-century concerns. How do you think the teaching of art has changed, or is changing, against this new landscape?

**EMC:** It is not clear to me why art education has to change to reflect 21st-century concerns. Of course, sensibilities change

and the insights of previous art open new horizons of recognition, and we should educate the students on these, but with or without a cell phone, humans remain the same as they have been for a long time. At least in those areas art has any relevance; in other areas that are circumstantial and thus constantly changing, art has little to say of any significance. It is easy to convince each other that art has important contributions to offer those social and intellectual currents that change with the passing century, but those convictions are mostly delusions.

Art education, however, must change for other reasons. Too many programs limp along with confused goals, are under-appreciated by the university administration, and their courses are based on the fears, lack of training, and insecurities of the faculty rather than on strengths and aspirations. This moment—any moment—is right to begin an unguarded exploration of what is good, lasting, and meaningful rather than what is topical, expedient and fear-based. This transformation will remain difficult as long as the uncomfortable fit of art within academia and the demands of transformative artistic training are not radically addressed.

**MM:** In various capacities, you continue to be involved in teaching while working as a professional artist. How do these roles complement one another?

**EMC:** The friction between the need to survive, the desire to maintain an authentic practice, and the vagaries of markets and popularities can erode integrity and enthusiasm, and I find the ambitions and trust of students stop that erosion. At different stages in my life, I have approached teaching differently. Now, I am fortunate that my position at the University of Southern California allows me to teach across many disciplines in the humanities as well as the arts while having a home in a great English department. I am also involved with the Anderson Ranch where I work with artists

who have been working for a while, and at Dartmouth College where I interact broadly with the students and faculty.

**MM:** Part of developing a long-term practice as an artist is that you're able to see connections to older work or your younger self, and to understand it with a different perspective. Do you find yourself revisiting older themes in your work and seeing different connections?

**EMC:** Maybe each of us only has one or two stories to tell, one or two concerns, but we never bring it forth clearly enough, so we re-invent it and re-cast it. So, I do find myself revisiting old territories, though they are never entirely familiar, and the roads are different every time.

**MM:** I heard you state once during a talk that sentiment is not the same as sentimentality, which I found an incredibly insightful comment. Are there other stigmas that artists have an unfair aversion to exploring?

**EMC:** There are many such aversions engendered and nurtured by the inferiority complex of the humanities, the impostor panic of the arts, and the broader social fear of appearing soft or unintelligent. These conditions lead many artists—and not just visual artists—to avoid subjects and viewpoints that might reveal they are not the sharp-eyed, tough-thinking, seen-it-all, first-rate individuals they are trying to pretend they are. These pretensions are maintained at the price of being, and those consequences are visible in the lives and works of many artists.

**MM:** What advice would you give to educators?

**EMC:** I would give them the same advice I give myself: your job is tough but full of possibility. Aim to do something you admire. Have something to offer, and if you don't, find it or get out. And grow where you are small instead of demanding the world to shrink.



national conference  
membership  
peer reviewed publication  
regional activity  
financially responsible  
grow and expand  
enthusiasm and commitment  
foundations guidelines  
attend an event  
contribute an article  
submit an idea  
support and hard work  
gather and share  
member institutions  
suggestions  
inclusive and diverse

## State of FATE

### President's message for *FATE in Review*, 2017-2018, Volume 36

Valerie Powell, *President*

Foundations in Art: Theory and Education

*Assistant Professor of Art*

*Foundations Coordinator*

WASH [Workshop in Art Studio + History]

Sam Houston State University

In our 40th year as a national organization, FATE continues to grow in membership and increased relevancy for faculty teaching during the first years of college. With an ever-shifting landscape in foundations higher education, it's worthwhile to reflect on several of FATE's recent achievements and new developments in the organization:

## National Conference

Our 16th Biennial Conference, *Beyond the Core*, brought together over 400 educators, artists and designers at The Kansas City Art Institute in April 2017. Many thanks to the KCAI team, FATE board, awards committee, session chairs, and presenters for all of the research and thoughtful planning that made the conference such a success.

We are busy planning the 17th Biennial Conference, *Foundations in Flux*, to be held in Columbus, Ohio, April 4th–6th, 2019, hosted by The Columbus College of Art and Design. Expanding on themes of flux and change, programming will include traditional conference panels, workshops, roundtable discussions, and much more. The conference will invite members to experience all that Columbus has to offer, with events at local art spaces, museums, and participation in the Gallery Hop Saturday evening. The FATE exhibition will be juried by Michael Goodson, senior curator of exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, in Columbus, Ohio. Andrew McCauley, Vice President of Biennial Conferences, and his dynamic team at CCAD have been a joy to work with, so save the date and plan to stay through Saturday to enjoy all of the diverse programming the team has in store for us!

## New Membership Rates

Under the leadership of Colleen Merrill, Vice President of Membership, we've made changes in membership options and fees for the 2018-2019 membership period, including a new discounted Adjunct Faculty membership rate for part-time and contingent faculty. We hope this encourages a broader and more inclusive conversation around foundations pedagogy. Members are given access to FATE *Members Share*, an impressive online resource, with project handouts, conference papers and presentations, rubrics, and much more. If you are not currently a FATE member, please visit our website to learn more about expanded membership benefits.

If you are a member, utilize these benefits and encourage non-members in your department to join FATE.

## FATE Voice

Michael Marks, editor for *FATE in Review*, has been instrumental in breathing new life into this peer reviewed publication. The depth and variety of scholarship surrounding foundations pedagogy found within this volume is impressive. Michael and his editorial staff are actively soliciting content for the next volume, so reach out if you are interested in submitting for a future *FATE in Review* publication.

FATE's bi-monthly podcast, *Positive Space*, has continued to expand its content based on member feedback. Guests enjoy an informal conversation and discuss a wide range of topics, including art and creativity, higher education, empathy, diversity, community engagement, collaborative projects, politics, and power structures in academia. *Positive Space* is made possible by the technical knowledge and commitment of FATE's Vice President of Development, Raymond Gaddy, along with the individuals who have shared their time, point of view, and insights. I have sincerely enjoyed the opportunity to interview so many thoughtful and creative people over the years. Episodes of *Positive Space* can be downloaded on several platforms, with links available on the FATE website. If you have a topic you would like to hear more about or a suggestion for a guest on the show please contact me. You can also give us a call and record a message, question, or idea at 904-990-FATE. We would love to hear from you!

## Regional Activity

Various FATE regional events occur all over the country, inviting educators, artists, designers, and historians to gather and share their goals of making foundational experiences more immersive in their communities. Recent events have been hosted in Texas, Georgia, Connecticut, and New

York, and have included brownbag lunches, workshops, and mini-conferences. If you are interested in, or simply curious about hosting a FATE regional event in your area, please contact Jessica Burke, Vice President of Regional Programming. She is eager to share her enthusiasm and offer the support necessary to run a creative and dynamic event. Remember that in addition to FATE's regional events, throughout the year we offer affiliate sessions at CAA, MA-CAA and SECAC conferences. We hope to connect with other FATE members during these events, and keep the discussion of foundations as an integral part of the conversation in higher education.

### Financial

FATE's Vice President of Finance, Casey McGuire, continues to work tirelessly to insure our organization is making responsible financial decisions. As a volunteer run organization, FATE's board is working tirelessly to keep costs low for membership and conference fees. In addition, Raymond Gaddy, FATE's Vice President of Development, works behind the scenes to build partnerships with corporate sponsors, which participate as vendors at our biennial conferences. Please visit our website to learn more about corporate sponsorship. Thanks to Casey and Raymond's hard work, FATE has continued to grow and expand its mission while continuing to support and serve our members while remaining financially responsible. Of course, we would not be able to carry out our mission without the generous support of our member institutions, whose backing helps support this peer-reviewed publication in addition to FATE's other vital programming. If this programming has been helpful to you in your career, consider a donation to FATE to assist us and the next generation of artist educators striving towards distinction in foundations teaching.

### Inclusion and Awards

Out of an urgent desire to broaden the foundations conversation and create a more inclusive and diverse community, board members Katie Hargrave, Colleen Merrill, Naomi Falk, and Guen Montgomery are busy brainstorming future programming opportunities to grow the FATE community. The FATE board is committed to expanding current programming in this area, and board member Jessica Burke is looking to implement aspects of inclusion and diversity into our FATE awards and Shout Out awards.

### Foundations Guidelines

The board has begun gathering data in an effort to update the 2007 Foundations guidelines outlined on the FATE website. We'll be surveying members and institutions soon, focusing on curriculum, practices, facilities, assessment, as well as the role of Foundations Coordinators. We are looking forward to presenting these updated guidelines at our upcoming FATE conference in 2019. If you are interested in contributing to this process please let us know.

### Join the Conversation

FATE's VP of Communications, Stacy Isenbarger, is keeping our website up to date and communicates regularly with members. The FATE website is updated several times a month, so be sure to visit to stay updated on FATE news. With over 2,500 members, our presence on Facebook continues to be a space where those curious about foundations can ask questions, get project ideas, and share resources. In addition, FATE recently joined Instagram! You can find us @artfoundations, as we explore how to use this platform to expand the conversation surrounding foundations. If you are eager to share your ideas and are more of a phone person, call the *Positive Space* podcast at 904-990-FATE and record a message. You just might hear your voice on the next episode of *Positive Space*!

FATE wouldn't exist without your support and hard work. Whether you attend a regional event, submit an idea to the podcast, contribute an article to the journal, or attend a national conference—our activities are a reflection of your enthusiasm and commitment to excellence in higher education. Consider not just your continued involvement in this conversation, but also how to connect new people to FATE. As always, let us know how we can help.

I am thankful for all of your work and remain incredibly proud to be a part of this dynamic organization. I look forward to hearing from you.

—Valerie Powell

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## About FATE

Foundations in Art: Theory and Education, FATE, is a national, non-profit 501(C)(3) organization dedicated to the promotion of excellence in the development and teaching of college-level foundations courses in both studio and art history. Founded in 1977 as an affiliate society of the College Art Association (CAA), members include approximately 400 studio and art history faculty and administrators, and over 30 sponsoring institutions. The organization sponsors a national conference bi-annually, regional conferences in interim years, panel sessions at CAA and regional associations, and publishes a professional journal (*FATE in Review*) and a newsletter. For more information, please see the website at [www.foundations-art.org](http://www.foundations-art.org).



### FATE logo

Philip B. Meggs (1942-2002)

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## FATE Officers 2017-2018

### President

Valerie Powell, Sam Houston State University

### Vice President for Development

Raymond Gaddy, Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Campus

### Vice President for Communications

Stacy Isenbarger, University of Idaho

### Vice President of Membership

Colleen Merrill, Bluegrass Community & Technical College

### Vice President of Finance

Casey McGuire, University of West Georgia

### Editor, *FATE in Review*

Michael Marks, Anderson University

### Vice President of Regional Programming

Jessica Burke, Georgia Southern University

### College Art Association Representative

Naomi Falk, University of South Carolina

### Mid-America College Art Association Representative

Guen Montgomery, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

### SECAC Representative

Katie Hargrave, University of Tennessee Chattanooga

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## FATE Membership Information

### Individual:

Regular membership dues are \$65.00 for 2 years.

Adjunct faculty dues are \$50.00 for 2 years.

Retiree faculty dues are \$45.00 for 2 years.

Graduate student membership is \$35.00 for 2 years.

### Institutional:

Regular sponsorships are \$150.00 for 2 years.

Membership information can be found online at [www.foundations-art.org](http://www.foundations-art.org).

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## Institutional Members

Anderson University  
Arcadia University  
Arkansas State University-Beebe  
Armstrong State University  
Benedict College  
Bluegrass Community & Technical College  
Bowling Green State University  
Brigham Young University  
California College of the Arts  
California State University Long Beach  
Carnegie Mellon University School of Art  
Cedar Crest College  
Chemeketa Community College  
Clemson University  
College for Creative Studies  
College of Central Florida  
Columbus State University  
Eastern Illinois University  
Fine Arts Center  
Florida State University  
Georgia Southern University  
Georgian College  
Grand Valley State University  
Herron School of Art & Design-IUPUI  
Hong Kong Design Institute  
Indiana University  
Jefferson Community & Technical College  
Johnson County Community College  
Kansas City Art Institute  
Keene State College  
Kent State University  
Kentucky College of Art + Design  
Kutztown University  
Louisiana State University  
Luther College  
Massachusetts College of Art and Design  
Metropolitan Community College

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Montana State University  
Mount Ida College  
Mt. Mary University  
Northeastern Illinois University  
Ontario College of Art and Design  
Oregon State University  
Otis College of Art & Design  
Parkland College  
Penn State University  
Pennsylvania College of Art and Design  
Purchase College, SUNY  
Rocky Mountain School of Art & Design  
Salisbury University  
Sam Houston State University  
San Jacinto College South  
Santa Fe Community College School of Arts  
Seneca College  
South Dakota State University  
South Suburban College  
St. Ambrose University  
Stevenson University  
Syracuse University  
Troy University  
Umpqua Community College  
University of the Fraser Valley  
University of Central Missouri  
University of Florida  
University of Idaho  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign  
University of Louisville-Hite Art Institute  
University of Mississippi  
University of Nevada Las Vegas  
University of North Carolina-Greensboro  
University of North Texas  
University of South Carolina  
University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

University of Tennessee-Knoxville  
University of the Arts  
University of the Fraser Valley  
University of West Georgia  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
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