

Fall 2017 Sabbatical Leave Report

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During fall 2017 I completed formal coursework: three units in my instructional discipline of Art History as well as nine units outside of my instructional discipline, specifically six units in Studio Art and three units in Media Studies.

I chose to enroll in a diverse set of undergraduate studies at community colleges rather than graduate units in my own discipline; my motivations were two-fold: first, to expand my own knowledge of these disparate fields and their relationship to my own teaching of visual culture; second, to deepen my understanding of and connection with the experiences and challenges of community college students.

Summary of Coursework

- American Art: A Multicultural Approach (3 units) at West Valley Mission College. This course represents formal class work in my discipline in Art History taken online. This course covers the history of art beginning with the conquest of the Americas by Europeans through every major ‘era’ of North American history: Early Republic & Jacksonian era ; America at war – Mexico and then Civil War; pre- and post- Gilded Age examining the effects of urbanization and industrialization; art against fascism in response to the World Wars; and finally from Cold War to the “Culture Wars” of the 1990s. The course structure is based on the text titled Framing America: A Social History of American Art by Frances K. Pohl condensed into an eight-week model, as such the course load was demanding. Students were responsible for two modules per week that covered two to three chapters of the text and typically included two quizzes

(one for each chapter), two “interactive” assignments, a critical thinking assignment, a discussion post and occasionally course feedback/evaluation surveys. The “major” assessments were midterm and final essay exams and a term paper based on a museum visit and focusing on research and analysis of a contemporary American artist.

- Studio Art at El Camino College (6 units)

Beginning Ceramics (Art 161) This course introduces students to techniques and materials in order to develop the technical skills fundamental to ceramic arts including both methods of hand-building with clay, fundamental to sculpture, as well as wheel-throwing — traditionally more in-line with “pottery.” This is significant because most often introductory level courses feature only one of these techniques, the hand or the wheel, but not both because they are time-consuming and labor intensive. Furthermore, techniques for glazing and decorating with handmade embellishments were also emphasized. All of the assignments were designed to build not only fundamental skills but more so the awareness of the possibilities of the materials and techniques. The assessments were completed six cups, six bowls, a mask, and an ossuary (box); this may not sound like much but in fact it is a high level of production for a 15 week period in which timing is of the essence.

Introduction to Jewelry & Metalsmithing (Art 173) This course introduces students to techniques and materials in order to develop the technical skills fundamental to the art of jewelry making with an emphasis on metalsmithing. Assignments are designed to develop creative and critical thinking as well as creative problem solving. Students are required to keep a notebook and a sketchbook to demonstrate research and the

creative design process in the development of five (or more) pieces of wearable art. I say “wearable art” rather than jewelry because each project was thematic and conceptually based, not limited to the realm of the simply aesthetic as one might assume with the title “jewelry.”

- Media, Gender and Race (3 Units) at Santa Monica College

This online course is an historical overview of media in the United States with an emphasis on the development of critical thinking regarding the representation, lack there-of and/or misrepresentation of differing populations throughout modern American history. Readings included the fundamentals of understanding the evolution of the techniques of mass media and their effects on social dynamics, primary historical sources (radio, television, film and period literature), and contemporary theory on and histories of media production and reception. Additionally, this course gave me the opportunity to study with Professor Nick Pernisco, both a professor and a media professional and founder of Understand Media, a media literacy website that I have used as a major course resource for teaching visual culture for many years now.

Personal and Institutional Benefits

My choice to enroll in undergraduate units rather than graduate students was primarily motivated by my personal perception regarding the evolution of the role of the community college in postsecondary education. It seems to me that over the past eighteen years our role shifted from inspiring and preparing students for higher education to being a “mini” university program of sorts, a substitute set of courses for those students who do have the skills to move on, and now back again (rightfully so) to addressing the concerns of underprepared and underrepresented populations. Over

the past decade we've seen the rise in the significance of the alignment of course objectives and outcomes with program and institutional objectives; the streamlining of certificates and majors to facilitate transfer; and more recently emphasis on guided pathways and equity initiatives. In all of this process we, the teachers, are in constant flux – ever in pursuit of more and better ways to serve the needs of the students while meeting the needs of the institution (the two are not always in line). I do stand by the belief that anything that educates and inspires the professor will materialize in the classroom to educate and inspire the students. So even though I'd love to immerse myself in specialized research in the field of art history, and that this could be good, I knew that I'd better serve the student population by meeting them where they stand, to get the student perspective on community college coursework and reflect on my own teaching practices and concerns. To this end, I do feel my sabbatical coursework had many successful outcomes.

My first goal was to deepen my knowledge of these disparate fields with formal study. All of the courses were topics and processes that I had not studied in my own college education. Each of the courses provided me information that will enhance the course material I currently teach.

- Studio Art: These two courses exposed me to an array of modern and contemporary artists and art issues of which I had no prior knowledge. Ceramics and Jewelry are not typically covered in survey courses and texts, and when they are included are usually relegated to a “minor” category. This is a remnant of historical hierarchies in art and academia now largely defunct and not relevant to methods of teaching of visual culture now. My expanded knowledge of these areas will allow me

to revise curriculum to eradicate older models of framing artistic practices.

Additionally of benefit, these courses exposed me firsthand to some of the teaching challenges faced by my fine arts colleagues. Experiencing their course designs gave a more intimate knowledge of our shared departmental benefits and challenges; this experience will help me contribute to larger departmental and division concerns.

- American Art history and Media Studies were both online courses and these perhaps will have the greatest impact and benefit to the students. In my own undergraduate and graduate education, online courses were non-existent so this added an extra dimension of informational acquisition above and beyond the historical frameworks of both of these courses. I found that I learned much more about both the potential and pitfalls of online course design by experiencing courses as a student than what I had learned from “how to teach online” workshops and courses. This ties in with my secondary goal of deepening my understanding of the student experience. The shift in perspective, from teacher to student, has inspired me most to rework content delivery and assignments that encourage more active engagement with ‘hands-on’ projects, not typically used in art historical methodology. I found both of the online courses to be too task oriented, privileging quantity over quality. They were both work intensive and left no room for rumination or exploration of concepts and events. There was also little to no direct exchange with the professors. Though the content of both courses was interesting and well presented, there was little opportunity for depth of experience that led me to cast a critical eye toward my own syllabi. All of the courses, albeit in different ways, inspire me to revise my course designs and ultimately produce new course resources.