CONNECTING INSPIRATION WITH INFORMATION

Studio art students and information literacy instruction

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This article discusses the partnership between the library and the studio art faculty at Oakland University that led to the integration of information literacy instruction into the studio art curriculum. The author outlines the importance of information literacy to artistic practice and student success, and discusses the program of instruction and learning outcomes. Early assessment of student needs and the program's effectiveness, using both citation analysis and anecdotal feedback, reveals that the program has contributed to the maturation of student research and inquiry skills, and positively affected the relationship between the department and the library, and provides preliminary conclusions about undergraduate studio art information behaviors. An ongoing further program of study to more fully describe the information needs of undergraduate studio art students is also outlined.

Communications in INFORMATION LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

A practicing artist continually seeks both information and inspiration, weaving together a disparate web of resources to create meaningful, impactful art and situate him- or herself within the larger context of canonical art history. Studio art students who are just beginning to formalize their personal concepts and oeuvres may neglect the library and the practice of academic research in favor of more time spent in the studio, despite the benefit such activities may have on their creative output and the ability to express their artistic goals in writing. The strategic partnering of librarians and art faculty to instruct them in the skills of information literacy (IL) has the potential to greatly impact the quality of student work and student persistence in this subject area, although there has been very little formal study of undergraduate studio art students' research habits and the impact of information literacy instruction. This article presents the first portion of a three-part plan of study to address that gap, describing a program of embedded information literacy in a studio art curriculum, its progression, and preliminary results.

INFORMATION LITERACY AND ARTMAKING

The library's role in the teaching of information literacy on university and college campuses has become critical to student success, with instruction increasingly becoming an important part of professional duties (Hall, 2013). Librarians often discuss information literacy in terms of students conducting research needed for academic papers, but information literacy skills are necessary for a wide-reaching range of information-seeking opportunities both in and out of the classroom.

When discussing information literacy and its instruction, the library literature most often refers to the set of competency standards published in 2000 by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), which lay out the basic characteristics of an information literate individual (ACRL, 2000). Due to changes in the way information is created, accessed, and used, and the growing awareness that information literacy is only one of many literacies necessary for success, these standards are currently under revision, with a coming framework that paves the way for a new generation of library instruction (Gibson & Jacobson, 2014). As the new framework recognizes, information literacy goes beyond just the basic critical thinking skills necessary to complete a formal research paper or other class assignment. Dane Ward (2006), a librarian at Illinois State University, exhorts us to remember that "information literacy also includes the imagination of information, our deepening experience of it, and appreciation for the richness of that vast reservoir of meaning and interior life. To imagine or create mental images in response to information is to bring to consciousness something of our own, something from the depths of our psychic life, and to have a connection to it" (p. 398).This deeper, more conceptual understanding of information literacy echoes the notion of art itself and the artistic practice: creating meaning from personal experience, forging connections with larger concepts and cultural references, and encouraging the practice of self-reflection. It also reinforces the importance of research

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and inspiration-seeking to an artist's formation (Tavin, Kushins & Elniski, 2007; Walker, 2001). For example, in her recent article, Stacey McKenna Salazar reviewed undergraduate teaching and learning literature related to the art studio, and concluded that there are many questions that current educators should be asking, including "In what ways do studio professors engage students in serious play, discovery, risk-taking, life-long learning, and other dispositions thought to be important to creativity and artmaking?" (Salazar, 2013, p. 73). Library resources and services serve to engage students in the life-long learning process, and encourage deeper self-discovery.

INFORMATION NEEDS OF STUDIO ART STUDENTS

The importance of educating studio artists in the synthesis of knowledge for both creative practice and critique has been acknowledged by several professional organizations, with an emphasis on the library and professional librarians as partners in this endeavor. The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD, 2013), for example, lays out in its handbook the requirements for member institution libraries, and specifies that instruction in art research resources be provided. Similarly, in its document *Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines*, the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) outlines the essential information skills that all studio art students should master with degree attainment, including graduated skill levels. These competencies were developed to supplement, in a discipline-specific way, the skills outlined in the ACRL Information

Literacy Competencies, and thus include directives for students to be familiar with general research skills along with subject-specific resources. For example, ARLIS/NA specifies that all studio art students should be able to effectively "Use *Art Bibliographies Modern* and *Bibliography of the History of Art* to locate articles, images, exhibition catalogs, dissertations, books and reviews" (p. 18), and to be aware of various information types within the field. The ARLIS/NA document also includes outcomes for students that deal with the ethical use of information, including a basic understanding of copyright.

Research into the information needs of both practicing artists and art students indicates that they prefer a wide variety of materials, in a wide variety of subjects, through which they may browse at will seeking not just information but also inspiration (Bennett, 2006). Studio art students often conduct research to inform their creative projects as they explore and comment upon concepts related to social issues, current events, and advances in fields outside of the arts. The literature consistently indicates that the print collection remains a critical need for this particular population, with a very recent article from Effie Patelos, in which she discusses the results of a faculty/artist panel discussion, reaffirming that "[artists noted] the importance of the book, mainly the printed art monograph" (Patelos, 2013, p. 45). In their study of recent graduates, termed "emerging artists and designers," Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson (2011) suggest that, along with a "peculiarly wide and personal range of information needs" (p.159), artists also desired information on careers and career development, and the legal and practical

considerations for setting oneself up in business.

Along with the information needs discussed in the literature above, student artists working in digital or mixed media can benefit from additional training in how to locate and ethically use materials for incorporation into their own projects. In addition, BA and BFA programs in studio art often require the completion of a senior capstone project that includes a written component: either a research thesis that carefully outlines the student's work within an art historical and critical context, or a personal artist statement that explains the student's creative inspirations and/or motivations. The course requirements for studio art students, even within liberal arts curriculums, may not expose the students very often to the practical aspects of research for such large projects or the technical aspects of formal writing assignments before they reach their capstone projects. As such, studio art students may be overwhelmed by the directives of the project requirements, and their writing may not accurately reflect the breadth and depth of their knowledge. In her discussion of a framework created to assist students who struggle with writing about their art, educators Linda Apps and Carolyn Mamchur note that "The contention as to whether rigorous academic writing belongs in the art department is no longer the question. How students can be assisted in successfully completing an arts degree that meets the rigor required is now the task" (Apps & Mamchur, 2008, 277).

Studio Art Students and Information Literacy Instruction

Although there is little written as yet on information literacy instruction for undergraduate studio art students, activity within professional organizations such as ARLIS/NA indicates that librarians are collaborating with studio art instructors to achieve information literacy outcomes (Brown, 2002; Gliubizzi & Glassman, 2010). As illustrated in the literature that does exist, programmatic instruction and the embedded liaison librarian model have been implemented within several art and design programs, with positive results on both the relationship between departmental faculty and library faculty, and student work. Alessia Zanin-Yost (2012) details the development of an information literacy component with an interior design curriculum, and Kasia Leousis (2013) describes how she built relationships with MFA students and faculty by making herself present within their spaces, such as the studio and the departmental spaces, and affected their approach to research as a result. Annette Haines (2004) echoes the relationship-building approach and how critical it is for helping students overcome any anxiety about using the library in her description of her activities as a "field librarian" embedded within the department. Art librarian Jennifer Mayer, in her book chapter "Embedding information literacy into a studio art course" (2010) provides both the results of a survey she conducted of library instruction and studio art programs, and information on how she has incorporated information literacy into the studio art program at her university. Her conversion of an introductory sculpture

class into what is known at her university as an "L" (information literacy) course involved students coming to the library for instruction sessions at least three times during the semester, with content tailored accordingly to their needs and interests and the goals of the course.

Considering undergraduate students in general, several studies have shown that library use contributes positively to a student's chances of degree completion and GPA (Primary Research Group, 2009; Soria, Fransen & Nackerud, 2013). George Kuh's (2008) pivotal work on high-impact practices in the classroom, including capstone work, writing-intensive courses, and high engagement with faculty, aligns perfectly with the roles the academic library plays on campus in regard to student success. It may seem like common sense, but it merits reinforcing the notion that the more students are exposed to the library and encouraged to take advantage of all it offers, the better they will perform during their academic years.

ART AND INFORMATION LITERACY AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

History
The College of Arts and Sciences at Oakland University (OU) offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio art with several media concentrations. The program is small, with typically between 10 and 20 graduates per semester, but it is quickly growing due to the recent addition of a graphic design major. To complete a degree in studio art, the program at OU includes the requirement that students write a formal thesis paper along with creating art for a culminating exhibition. In the winter semester of 2011, a

faculty member from the art department contacted the new art librarian requesting an information literacy session for her studio art senior thesis seminar students. Prior to this time, no library or information literacy instruction had been presented to the studio art students at OU, and the faculty member had grown concerned with the students' lack of awareness of library resources and of how research connects to the making of art. This initial instruction session introduced many of the students to the physical spaces of the library and its collection, including art monographs, art journals, and art-related databases. Notably, this was the first time using the library and its databases for many of the students. Due to the success of this session, the faculty member and the librarian developed a plan to scaffold information literacy skills throughout the studio art curriculum, initially concentrating on a single major, photography. The photography students provided a test group to develop and assess the effectiveness of this programmatic information literacy instruction, with the end goal being integration across all studio art majors. Although this department's population represented a small research sample, it provided an excellent opportunity to study information literacy formation in studio art students. Prior to the instruction described, the students had not been exposed to any subject-specific IL instruction. Furthermore, the formal thesis requirement for graduation appeared to be rare for undergraduate studio art majors, regardless of institution or program type.

Scaffolded Instruction
The benefits of progressive, scaffolded information literacy sessions in a specific major include the ability to introduce

research skills to students early on in their coursework, and to build upon those skills with incremental lessons that reinforce previous concepts and introduce new challenges. These lessons are designed to prepare students for their capstone course and for the production of a formal research paper. Instructional repetition provides opportunities for authentic learning activities, so students know how to produce a formal paper, and so they are practiced at applying critical thinking and evaluative skills for a lifetime of information-seeking and artmaking (see Supplement 1).

In previous years, library research services were underutilized by studio art students. With the introduction of library sessions into the curriculum, however, the number of studio students asking questions at the research help desk or making appointments with their subject librarian increased dramatically.

In planning the studio art information literacy curriculum, the art librarian consulted the ARLIS/NA *Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines* (2000), the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards* (2013), and the ACRL *Visual Literacy Competency Standards* (2011); she also used feedback from studio art faculty members on what they perceived to be the most pressing student needs. Learning outcomes from the aforementioned standards documents were matched to stages of the photography curriculum, and the targeted courses were paired with instruction and active learning assessments (see Supplement 2). To accompany the planned instruction sessions, the art librarian created course guides for each class using the library's Subjects Plus

system. An open-source alternative to Libguides, the Subjects Plus system allows for efficient creation and updating of course and subject-level pages. The guides created for the present case study included recommendations for print and electronic resources, tips for effectively finding and citing sources, and other materials suited to the needs of the students.

Online Learning Objects

As the scaffolded studio art information literacy program expanded at OU, the time commitment for both the librarian and the studio art class time became a concern. The creation of online learning objects provided a solution; for example, the library created a tutorial course instructing students on copyright using the university's learning management system, Moodle. The course modules were designed to teach copyright basics, the rights of copyright holders, and the responsible use of others' material (Rodriguez, Greer & Shipman, 2014). The course, which takes forty-five minutes for students to complete on average, effectively replaced in-person instructional time. The librarian and art studio faculty have subsequently planned online learning objects for students, which continue to supplement in-class instruction.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT: THESIS CITATION ANALYSIS

Methodology

To maintain a dynamic instructional program and allow it to grow along with the students and department, it is important to constantly assess and reevaluate. As one measure of assessing the information literacy needs of the studio art student population at Oakland University,

coinciding with the development of the instructional program, the librarian gathered several years' worth of cited references from the capstone thesis papers, from 2004 to the present, to analyze the types of information sources students drew upon to inform their work. A total of 120 bibliographies were retrieved, with 717 citations among them.
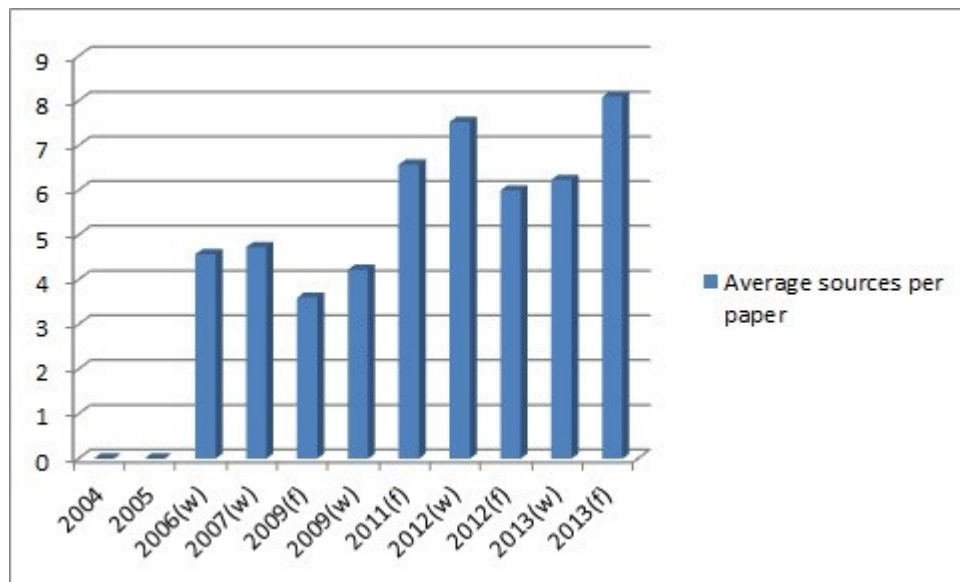
Citation analyses are a commonly accepted measure of assessment and study in the library literature; however, no such study of undergraduate art student papers has been published. For the initial citation analysis, the librarian assigned a category to each citation and performed a simple, spreadsheet count of source types. Categories assigned included the following: scholarly article, artist website, blog post, book, book review, dissertation/thesis, gallery/museum website, lecture notes, magazine/newspaper article, textbook, trade publication, video, general website, and Wikipedia. The decision was made to not simplify to a single internet site

category because information on bleeding-edge contemporary artists can be difficult to find in academic published material and, as a result, students are encouraged during IL sessions to turn to sources such as the artist's official website, the gallery that represents him or her, or museum websites for information; student use of such specific sites, therefore, was important to quantify. Similarly, the librarian was interested in the types of periodical material consulted by students, so those sources were divided accordingly. Works of art are commonly cited in student reference papers, so a non-textual source count was included as a separate measure; however, these non-textual sources are not included in the calculations herein as they author was concerned with textual research behaviors and the students were not consistent in choosing whether to cite art that they included in their papers.
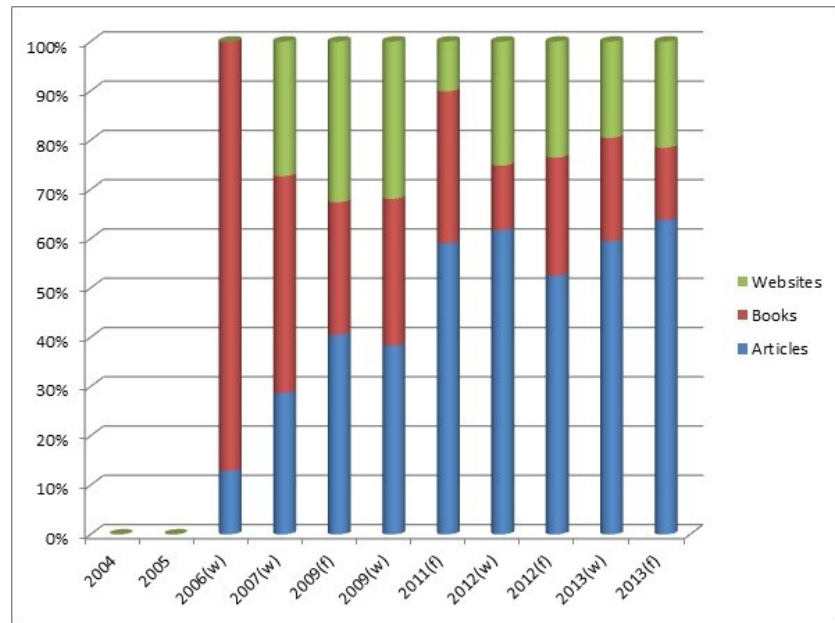
Discussion

The data from the citation analysis

FIGURE 1—AVERAGE NUMBER OF SOURCES PER PAPER, BY SEMESTER

FIGURE 2—PERCENTAGE OF CITED SOURCES BY TYPE AND SEMESTER

demonstrated an overall trend toward more scholarly work, beginning in 2004 with zero cited references and ending in 2013 with an average of eight sources per paper (due to departmental records reorganization, the year 2010 was missing). The data showed a growing number of sources cited per paper; it also showed a notable increase in the number of authoritative sources, especially academic journal or news articles (see Figures 1 & 2).

The use of scholarly journal articles was slightly uneven, with some semesters having far heavier use than others; however, in fall of 2011 the numbers of journal articles jumped considerably. This surge in journal article citations may be explained by the corresponding debut of the library's discovery tool (currently the Serials Solutions *Summon* product), which improved students' ability to locate journal articles. The effect of IL instruction during

the first semester the librarian began working with the art students may also have resulted in a similar surge in cited journal articles.

Interestingly, the students in this case study appear to rely less and less on the traditional monograph, which runs counter to the information-seeking literature about artists. In 2006, books (not including textbooks) represented 90% of the cited material; in the fall semester of 2013, books only accounted for 31% of the cited references. The studio art faculty at OU have flagged this as a concern, asserting the notion that the book is still a critical part of information-seeking as a component of art practice. To address this, many faculty members now require their students to use the library books collection to enforce browsing skills and encourage productive library use habits. Further research, as described below, will help to assess whether this is a behavior is unique to

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OU students or is a more wide-ranging generational shift.

This round of assessment efforts, including the citation analysis and the library assignments (see [Supplement 1](#)), has highlighted some continuing areas of concern, including students' ethical use of information and their evaluation of information. Although students are citing more sources (and are hopefully less likely to be unintentionally plagiarizing as a result), the quality of their citations varies significantly. Again, this is likely a reflection of the students' lack of prior experience with academic writing. To address this shortcoming, new activities that provide practice in formatting citations have been introduced into the curriculum. The more exposure students have to such mundane details as they progress through the studio art curriculum, the better prepared they will be for their capstone course and possible graduate work.

In the area of source evaluation, the increase in citations to published journal and news articles is promising, but the citations indicate that many students still rely on the results from basic Google searches to fuel their research. As of 2012 a new source started appearing in reference lists as well: Wikipedia. Although websites and resources such as Wikipedia may be useful as one begins exploring new ideas, they are typically not appropriate for formal projects; further instruction to promote critical source evaluation has been introduced or redesigned to address this gap. As noted above, it is important for librarians to recognize that studio art students have different evaluative criteria than students in other disciplines. For example, the lag in

academic publishing may force students to use artist or museum websites, or even gallery sites, to find pertinent information. Although these sources are generally not scholarly, the information they provide may be critically important to a student's understanding of contemporary art trends. Great care is taken when instructing students in these skills to make clear the difference between what would be considered a reputable source of information on the public web, and what would not.

The art librarian has spent the past few semesters playing "catch-up," teaching students at all levels many of the same skills in order to prepare them for their capstone theses. The studio art department and the library are also working to develop a strategic plan for library instruction that will most effectively introduce students to skills at points of need in their curriculum. The end goal is that by the thesis level, students will not need library instruction; instead, they will work with the art librarian outside of class time on individual research needs for their thesis papers. The thesis class from the spring semester of 2014 implemented this approach to research, and the instructor reported back very favorably on the outcome, noting that several of the papers exemplified the results of the library and departmental partnership due to their above-average research quality.

The success of integrated library instruction within the photography curriculum and the capstone course has led to the art studio department as a whole look for ways to include library instruction throughout the curriculum. Plans are in place to include the librarian at several points of need in the

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various majors. Students have also requested activities outside of the classroom, such as an "Art and Research" faculty panel discussion, and a workshop on grant writing. At the request of the department, the librarian now serves as the faculty advisor for the student art group, which has helped to facilitate a greater level of librarian embeddedness.

An artist's ability to textually communicate his or her vision to the world in a clear and effective manner resides not only in the effectiveness of his or her writing, but also the information that supports that writing. Research also informs the creation of art itself, as the more exposure artists have to knowledge and the work of their peers and predecessors necessarily impacts their ideas and artistic directions. As universities train the next generation of artists, therefore, it is critical—especially in this age of information—that they be given the skills necessary to effectively navigate, evaluate, and incorporate information into their artistic practices. As shown in this case study, studio art faculty and students benefit when partnering with a subject librarian who is familiar with the appropriate disciplinary resources and the most effective means with which to imbue the skills of finding and using relevant information.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Library instruction was not the sole variable affecting the quality of student source selection in this study. Thesis requirements, importance placed on research by faculty members, and student experience with research and writing were also factors. However, comments from studio art faculty indicate that information literacy instruction

has had a positive impact on student work. One faculty member remarked in an email message that "I can tell that your exercises helped in [the students' projects'] conceptual fortitude" (D. Lambert, personal communication, November 19, 2014). The growing number of citations per each thesis paper, and their improving quality, also indicates that the program in this study works. However, the small student sample is not generalizable to all studio art students. In order to more fully study the information-use habits of undergraduate studio art students, the author has secured the capstone papers from two additional schools—one a larger liberal arts program and one an art school—in order to conduct a more rigorous citation analysis. These papers will be analyzed for source types, subject classes of monographs used by students, percentages of library-held resources used by students, and other criteria, in order to answer in a more comprehensive manner the question of how and what source materials this particular disciplinary group of students use.

Still, a citation analysis presents only one piece of the larger puzzle. While it may indicate usage trends and suggest behaviors, it shows nothing of the motivation behind the information choice or seeking process. To further explore these ideas, therefore, a third component of study is in the planning stages, which will potentially include a student survey, classroom observations, and focus groups. The target populations for this final portion of the author's planned program of study will ideally be the same as the expanded citation study, providing much needed further insight into this too-often neglected population.

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