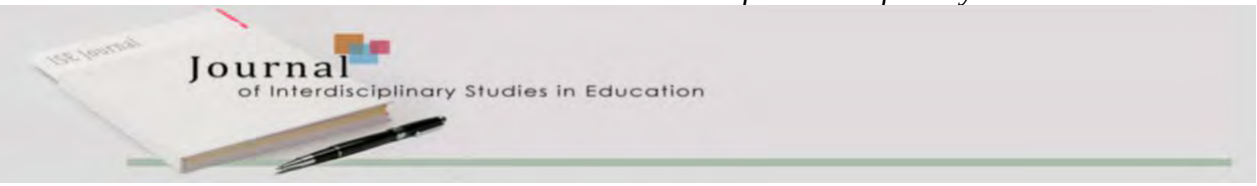
ISSN 2166-2681 |Volume 6, Number 2 | (2018)



TEACHING ABOUT GRAFFITI AND STREET ART TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT U.S. UNIVERSITIES: CONFRONTING CHALLENGES AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews two scholars' experiences teaching about the subjects of graffiti and street art to undergraduate students in U.S. universities. Using auto-ethnographical methods, the instructors review the challenges that they encountered and the various strategies they experimented with to overcome these difficulties. Issues discussed include the unique composition of the student body, the methods by which the students were introduced to the subject matter, choice of readings, assignments, and evaluation procedures. The authors progress from a slow and perhaps cautious introduction of the material on graffiti and street art into existing classes, to a full-fledged course on the subject matter. Suggestions are presented for other instructors considering teaching a class or assignments on the subject matter of graffiti and street art.

Keywords: graffiti, street art, pedagogy, interdisciplinary teaching

Introduction

Graffiti and street art can be found in almost every major metropolitan city throughout the world.[1] As the focus of research, the number of academic articles, chapters in scholarly books, and edited collections and monographs about graffiti and street art have recently increased, forming its own interdisciplinary field of study (Ross, 2016; Avramidis & Tsilimpounidi, 2017; Ross, Bengtsen, Lennon, Phillips, & Wilson, 2017). As the central theme of a college or of a university course, however, graffiti and street art has not yet found its place.[2] Although instructors teach about street art and graffiti in some art classes and workshops, and there are professors[3] who touch upon this subject in a range of courses, few classes specifically dedicated to graffiti and street art exist. We believe, however, that graffiti and street art courses could benefit students across the academy, but particularly if the instructor teaches the course

from an interdisciplinary framework. This article will feature our experiences as a Criminology/Criminal Justice professor and a Humanities professor to highlight our challenges, successes and failures in trying to incorporate this subject into our courses, or teach a stand-alone course on this subject. Although we both have spent years researching and publishing on this subject, this article is intended to discuss our pedagogical experiences in the hope that other instructors will be better prepared to teach courses in graffiti and street art in the near future.

There are certainly significant challenges with teaching courses on this subject. A course that focuses on graffiti and/or street art, after all, delves into practices that are inherently illegal, unsanctioned, and often risqué. Any instructor willing to teach this course will be working with a subject matter that is amorphous, nontraditional, and potentially controversial (Crosby, 2012). In general, the more esoteric the topic, the more that instructors are opening themselves to potential concerns from students, faculty and university administrators. What can professors do to improve their chances of delivering a successful class?[4] And, how does one examine this subject from multiple points of view, allowing for a social and economic context of graffiti and street art to parallel sophisticated reading and analyzing practices? One might look at how other instructors have approached this subject to get some ideas on how to structure a course. Unfortunately, scant scholarly research on teaching this specific type of course exists.

In order to assist instructors and scholars who wish to teach a class on graffiti, street art, or both subjects combined, this article reviews the authors' experiences with the hope that it will be of assistance to those contemplating a similar exercise and experience. In general, the authors surmise that there are probably two strategies: one is to systematically introduce the subject of graffiti and/or street art into a currently existing class in a piecemeal fashion (one or two lectures or units), while the other more ambitious experiment is to offer an entire class on the subject matter. Both of these strategies have been used by the writers of this article and will be discussed at greater length below.

In addition to the challenges that teaching this subject matter entail, the authors have taught courses on graffiti and street art from two distinctly different fields. Jeffrey Ian Ross has taught graffiti and street art focused classes in a Criminology/Criminal Justice Department, University of Baltimore. John Lennon has taught a variety of assignments focusing on graffiti as well as a graffiti-focused Humanities courses in three different educational institutions (i.e., St. Francis College, University of South Florida, Polytechnic and University of South Florida, Tampa). Both authors did not have any models when they began teaching these courses and when they taught these classes they were unable to locate publicly available syllabi (via the internet) on courses that specifically focus on graffiti and street art in the U.S. In criminology/criminal justice, we know of no courses being offered on this subject. In the Humanities, although there are assignments and lectures on graffiti in courses in visual studies, art, urban studies or sociology, we have found very few courses that have centered upon this subject. In the past year, however, we found two courses being offered that specifically examine graffiti. The first course, "Praxis: Graffiti as Public Voice," was taught in the Spring of 2014 by Dr. Jenny Whitcher and Keith "Lemon" White at the Iliff School of Theology.[5] The second class was offered by Dr. Greg Childs, an assistant professor of History at Brandeis University who taught a course in Spring 2017 entitled, "Writing on Walls: Histories of Graffiti in the Americas." Although we are pleased to learn about these courses, the numbers are few and there is no literature that specifically deals with the pedagogical approach to teaching courses involving graffiti and street art.

This article is an attempt to offer practical advice for others who wish to teach courses in this subject. What follows is first a synopsis of the courses in which the subjects of graffiti and street art were taught and the various assignments each of the authors required their students to complete. We then offer a self-reflective analysis of the pros and cons of each modality of introducing graffiti/street art content into the class. The conclusion presents an urging and justification for graffiti and street art courses to embrace an interdisciplinary ethos in the fabric of their courses and to recognize the various strengths and weaknesses that students bring to a topic like this.

By anchoring this article in our experiences in different departments and types of universities/colleges, we offer analysis on what we found successful along with what did not work for us in our own classrooms. We are not offering, however, specific detailed assignments nor full syllabi in this article; rather, we are providing our rationales and experiences for structuring our assignments and courses in the manner that we do. As two white male academics who taught in institutions in the in the Mid-Atlantic, the Northeast, and Southeast, we readily acknowledge that our experiences and framing will be different from faculty of other races, ethnicities, and genders in other places of the country, and other locations throughout the world. It is our goal, however, that by reading about our various experiences, readers can benefit from our experiences and use them as a starting place to build their own courses.

Teaching new, unusual, and/or controversial classes in the departmental curriculum

Numerous new, unusual, and/or controversial subjects inundate the undergraduate curriculum. These topics are covered in classes found in a variety of departments throughout the social sciences, hard sciences, medicine and engineering. Although a few web pages hosted by university academic learning departments provide information to faculty on "teaching controversial subjects,"[6] only a relative handful of scholarly articles discuss the challenge of introducing controversial subjects.

Even though some of this literature examines this subject in general terms (e.g., Kelly, 1986; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2000; Payne & Gainey, 2003; Ezzedeen, 2010; Hand & Levinson, 2012), other scholarly research tends to outline the challenge of introducing new, unusual or controversial classes in a subject-specific context including Criminal Justice (e.g., Payne & Gainey, 2000), Physical Education (Overby et al., 1996), Sciences (Oulton, Dillon, & Marcus, 2007), and the Humanities (Bruen et al., 2016).

This research provides important lessons to instructors, departmental administrators, and deans of instruction who are considering this particular challenge should benefit from analyzing the experiences, lessons and advice embedded in this scholarship. On the other hand, many instructors, for one reason or another, will not read this work or benefit from this advice, proceeding on a trial and error basis until they are satisfied with the outcome of their course or they give up in frustration. Regardless, units, lectures and entire classes devoted to understanding graffiti and street art is a rarity in most U.S. university curriculum and no amount of review of scholarship will supplant for direct experience.

Interrogating our respective experiences teaching graffiti and street art courses

Instructors teaching these classes are best advised to approach teaching this course as a work in progress. In other words, the class should be organized so that it can accommodate

subtle changes throughout the semester based on the formal and informal feedback they get from their students, or perceptions they have about students attempting to understand this complex subject. Although this is a clever pedagogical strategy for all courses, for a class that deals specifically with controversial material such as graffiti and street art, it is important to keep checking in with students and adjusting material and class interactions.

In some departments, there is little flexibility in the courses one can teach and in offering unusual or innovative subjects. Changing established curriculum or introducing new courses can be a substantial challenge. In many departments and schools, there are often not enough faculty members to teach the core classes. Sometimes professional accrediting agencies require tenured faculty to teach the core classes placing pressure on these faculty to teach the existing required courses in the curriculum.[7] There is also often an unwritten rule that new faculty teach the large introductory classes, and that over time, particularly as professors advance in rank, they may be allowed to teach courses in which they have some research specialization. In the Humanities, as many state and private universities move to "performance-based" funding models that often position students away from liberal arts degrees, faculty are often tasked with teaching service level courses, with opportunities to teach specialized courses increasingly more rare (Cattaneo, 2016; Letizia, 2016).

Self Disclosure

Jeffrey Ian Ross is a professor of Criminology/Criminal Justice who has taught close to two decades in a School of Criminal Justice at a mid-Atlantic University. Although trained as a Political Scientist, the majority of his research is in policing, corrections, crimes of the powerful, street culture and crime and justice in American Indian Communities. He has published in the field of graffiti and street art for the past three years. He interprets this subject through the lens of resistance and street culture.

John Lennon is an English professor with a Cultural Studies orientation who has taught in a number of related fields: composition, American Literature, film and popular culture and American Studies. In each of these fields, he has taught graffiti and street art in various capacities. For this author, there has been a slow evolution of graffiti-themed assignments in his classes, from a simple one-off paper assignment in a composition course when teaching in a college in Brooklyn New York to a whole course dedicated to the subject in a public research university in Tampa, Florida. He has published in the field of graffiti for the past seven years, examining it through the lens of gentrification, resistance and conflict politics.

Both authors had different approaches to the introduction of graffiti and street art content into the curriculum in their respective departments, and thus the discussion below details their progression from the one-off assignment to a fully-fledged course on graffiti and street art. Before continuing, we also recognize that because of the different emphases in the two disciplines, students may want to focus on different material from a class on graffiti and street art.

One-off Assignment, Composition Course, Urban College in the Northeast

The first time I (John) taught a specific assignment on graffiti was when I was an assistant professor in St. Francis College, a small, Catholic College located in downtown Brooklyn. I was teaching a range of courses but each semester I would be assigned at least two

sections of composition. The course was a somewhat standard "Composition One" class with institutionally required student produced pages of writing per semester with the subject matter of the course and individual assignments up to the individual professor. The student population was ethnically diverse with a mix of traditional and nontraditional students. Many were first generation college students and were often from working-class backgrounds.

The graffiti assignment came out of desperation: After two units of literature-based paper assignments, I felt I was losing student interest. I wanted to find a subject matter for my third unit that would include an ethnographic element allowing students to investigate the world around them in a substantial, hands-on way. Graffiti was an obvious choice for me. Growing up in the same type of neighborhoods that I did (I was born and raised in Queens), the city flowed through the veins of my students. Graffiti was intimately part of the city and so they absorbed it as they did the smog; they knew it existed but they didn't mostly think about it and how it affected their day-to-day lives. In my opinion, analyzing the commonplace and finding the extraordinary is an ideal for any student-produced writing and so I revised what I had originally planned and quickly introduced the new four-week unit. The culminating five-page final paper assignment had a simple dictate, "Find a piece of graffiti and describe it."

The assignment was purposely open and allowed students to write about graffiti in a myriad of ways. They could write a process-oriented paper describing how the graffiti was actually formed, using technical (and researched) language that would describe the process of putting a particular graffito on a specific wall. Alternatively, they could contextualize the graffito within a larger history of New York City graffiti. They also had the opportunity to write an analytical paper instead where they could discuss the "meaning" of the graffiti: they were encouraged to do "person-on-the-street" interviews, asking random men and women about their thoughts on a particular graffito and/or they could interview graffiti writers about the graffito and ask them their personal experiences within the graffiti subculture.

The goal of their paper was to make visible what is often invisible in our lives: to actually "see" this graffito (instead of letting it mesh into the visual "noise" of the environment) and explore its complexities. Additionally, another goal was to move away from simplistic "love it"/ "hate it" impulse feelings some of us have when looking at graffiti and to learn about this subject in a small but specific way. To facilitate this learning and to set up the unit, in the first week, we went on a graffiti walking tour.

I had graffiti enthusiast and scholar Matt Burns give a short history of graffiti (from a Northeast perspective). Before the walking tour, Matt gave a general overview of graffiti that laid out some of the contemporary history, introduced technical terms ('piece', 'bombing', etc.) and illustrated the process of making graffiti.[8] He and I then lead a walking tour through my neighborhood of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood that had a great mixture of graffiti and street art (Lennon, 2009). We spotted and discussed different types of graffiti (e.g., murals, tags, pieces, etc.) and Matt discussed the process writers had to go through in order to create the graffiti. Students started spotting patterns among the different graffitos, deciphering names and even anticipating where certain taggers would hit. They learned how to look up at the water towers or to look down at the paint drips on the sewer grates that spelled out a tag. We even found small tags in the cement outer walls of a converted factory, dated from the 1940s. Throughout the two-hour tour, students were encouraged to take pictures and ask questions.

The next week, students had to "find" their own specific graffito and bring images of it to class. Some found large pieces in their neighborhoods, others found smaller ones near the school,

and another found a tag in the men's bathroom a few doors from our classroom. We looked at the images together as a class, discussed how these tags were written (trying to decipher the letters) and researched styles. We spent time in the library, discussing how to do research. The students then went about researching their graffito—some worked on process detailed papers, while others were more analytical. The final two weeks of the unit followed typical composition course patterns: drafts, peer review, editing and final paper.

Pros and Cons of a one-off unit in a composition class

I wanted students to be able to get out of the classroom and write about a subject that they thought they knew (and dismissed) and see it in a novel, complex way. The unit accomplished these goals and I received great feedback from students. For a composition course, I feel it worked. Essentially, though, it was a one-off topic; there was no overall connection to other units of the course and after completing the paper assignment, students moved onto a different subject. We did not deal in-depth with issues of race, gender or class that are essential when understanding graffiti and street art. For evaluation purposes, I was not so concerned that students had a wide understanding of graffiti; learning to write strong essays was privileged over specific graffiti-based knowledge. In terms of depth of content, therefore, I feel as if this assignment was certainly lacking.

Large Group Final Project in a Popular Culture and the Visual Arts course, Semi-rural branch in Florida

The second time I taught a graffiti themed project, I put the subject more centrally in my course. "Popular Culture and the Visual Arts" was an upper level, writing-intensive general education exit course (students had to take an "exit" course in order to graduate) that I taught at the University of South Florida, Polytechnic. The students were mostly working-class students from Lakeland and surrounding rural areas of Central Florida who were interested in the STEM fields. Being a polytechnic, the university's philosophy was for faculty to incorporate hands-on, project-based learning for all courses. The Humanities course was small with twelve students from various majors (none from the Humanities) who had neither prior interest in, nor desire to learn about, graffiti. I spent the first half of the course using a mostly lecture and discussion based platform where I gave an introduction to theories of popular culture, cultural studies and Visual Studies. The other half of the course ("the practice part") was devoted to graffiti. For three weeks, I laid the foundation: we read excerpts from texts about the history of graffiti (i.e., Mailer, 1974; Banksy, 2005, Chalfant & Cooper 2009, Gastman 2010) and watched classic graffiti documentaries (i.e., *Style Wars*, *Wild Style*, and *Stations of the Elevated*). I skyped in two NYC graffiti writers to discuss their experiences with the subculture and also introduced students to the language and process of writing graffiti.

My students from Lakeland were much different from my urban students in Brooklyn. Although USFP's students were also mostly from working-class backgrounds and a number were first generation college students, most were white. Their relationship to graffiti also varied. When I asked them in the beginning of the course about graffiti they see in their day-to-day lives, most said there was none or very little. For their culminating assignment, I wanted a unit that would help reveal the "hidden" world that was all around them; their class project was

straightforward but caused much initial consternation: "Create a short documentary, mapping out the graffiti scene of Lakeland."

To accomplish the task, students had to do a variety of things: first they all met in downtown Lakeland and they took pictures of all the graffiti they found within a radius of a few blocks (once they started looking, they were shocked to find so much graffiti that they had never seen before). Sophisticated questions were developing as they tried to categorize the graffiti including: What exactly was graffiti? Could an advertisement be graffiti? Could graffiti be legal? What's the difference between graffiti and street art? Research into these questions, therefore, helped them form their own (shifting) conclusions. After reviewing the pictures and agreeing on the parameters of what could be called *graffiti*, they then mapped the graffiti onto a webpage using simple mapping software that they learned by themselves. This software allowed users to click on particular locations on a street map of Lakeland to generate the images of graffiti that could be found there. While completing this task, some students participated in ethnography: a few students interviewed passerbys and asked them their views on graffiti. Others interviewed Lakeland's police officers that were tasked with the job to stop, fine, and/or arrest graffiti writers. Other students asked storeowners who were "bombed" what they thought of graffiti (students were surprised by the wide range of opinions). After compiling all this information, they made a short documentary. None of the students had any training in geo-tagging software or making films—although we did have assistance from the IT department and access to a computer lab. The process of creating the documentary was laborious but there was great communal bonding among students. They also learned practical skills (from how to use a camera to how to use mapping software to how to upload a video on YouTube) alongside developing initial conclusions to analytical questions of the nature and categorization of graffiti, its legality and its place in their city.[9]

The final short documentary that the class produced was what I expected: a somewhat rudimentary film that showed effort and the formations of complex ideas, but overall was not a highly skilled production; these students were, after all, neophytes to both the subject and to video production. It did, however, accomplish the goals of the class where they matched practical skills with overall relatively complicated ideas, all-the-while interacting (and discovering) parts of the city that they had previously missed. For a bonus, the YouTube documentary was discovered and written about in the local community paper, opening up the four walls of the classroom.

Pros and Cons of a Graffiti and Street Art Themed Cultural Studies Course

For a course on popular culture and visual arts, the theme of graffiti works extremely well. Having students go out into the community, discover a hidden world that was in plain sight, gather basic transferable skills while learning to form and ask sophisticated analytical questions are certainly all benefits from this type of large group assignment. The course worked because the course was extremely small and allowed for a nimbleness among students who, because of the nature of the university, were used to group assignments. When I have scaled this course up in a larger 30-person course in a non-polytechnic, the results were more varied.

One polytechnic student, though, was a woman who at the time she was taking the course was also studying for the exam to become a police officer. Her insights and questions revealed to me my own biases as a professor—I have been fascinated by this subculture since being a teenager living in Queens and, regardless of the assignment, I have explored graffiti in terms of

"resistance" focusing on issues related to class, race and gender. This particular student, though, wanted to discuss it in much more black and white terms of legal vs. illegal. She slowed down much of my thinking and continuously interjected a criminal justice framework, forcing us to work through issues that I had bypassed in previous courses on this subject matter. It was through these class discussions that she suggested that we discuss graffiti enforcement with the local police—an excellent idea that sharpened my resolve to think about criminal justice issues in future assignments and courses.

Course, MAPPING PUBLIC ART IN YBOR CITY, Public Research University in Southeast

As detailed above, I have used graffiti and street art as topics for assignments and even the overall theme of the course but I have not taught a course specifically on graffiti and street art. I have decided to do so. I am currently an associate professor of English at the University of South Florida on its main campus in Tampa. Teaming up with history professor, we are teaching a digital humanities course entitled, "Mapping Public Art in Ybor City." Ybor City is an old urban city best known for its vibrant history of Cigar making by its Cuban immigrants (Mormino & Pozzetta, 1998). In recent years, however, the city has suffered through the economic downturn in the 1990s and early part of this century. In the present day, however, there has been an attempt to gentrify the city— and, like many cities undergoing this process, public art (both legal and illegal) is a significant cornerstone of the renewal process (Gibson & Klockar, 2005; Florida, 2014).

The goal of the class is to have a historical basis when examining public art (which includes sculptures, signage, street art and graffiti). Students will be responsible for creating a curated, mapped walking tour of the city based on this art. While students will have the opportunity to map and research officially sanctioned art, students will also have to explore the ephemeral, illegal art of the city; any discussion of art in Ybor City must consist of dialoging among the two. "Official" maps are often connected to capitalistic production and (white-washed) paths that only promote specific types of tourism. We are more interested in creating curated maps like Rebecca Solnit's projects—examining art from different perspectives, allowing for individual experiences of the city's art to dominate pathways and revealing place-specific stories that discuss hidden or underrepresented narratives (Solnit 2010; Solnit & Snedeker, 2013; Solnit & Jelly-Schapiro, 2016).

This course is a culmination of a decade of working graffiti piecemeal into my courses. The evolution from one assignment to a full course has been slow but steady, opportunistically adding more complicated and extensive projects when certain courses allowed for this expansion. The "Mapping Public Art in Ybor City" course is a natural progression of the ideas I have implemented so far: it allows for students to be participant-observers in their community while granting them the opportunity to reevaluate a subject that they live with on a day-to-day basis but may not have given it much thought. Most importantly, though, it permits them to work through this subject over 15 weeks, allowing ideas to germinate and progress.

To make this course palatable to the administration as well as appeal to a number of students from a variety of majors, I have capitalized on the large interest in the Digital Humanities (DH) that has taken place throughout universities in the U.S (Kirschenbaum, 2014). Digital tools have been instrumental in the resurgence of graffiti/street art popularity in the past decade and using digital tools to display and analyze graffiti/street art is a resourceful way to understand this subject more fully. Graffiti takes place on the streets but it is evaluated and

dispersed on the Internet and social media platforms (MacDowall, 2017). In addition, learning hard skills (i.e. mapping, coding, digital curating) allow students to demonstrate their new knowledge in ways that could long outlive the time in the classroom.

Pros and Cons of a Digital Humanities Course on Graffiti and Street Art

For many faculty, courses evolve from their scholarly interests. Two particular threads of my scholarly endeavors in graffiti have dealt specifically with a) graffiti history and b) the role graffiti and street art plays in the gentrification process of a city (Lennon, 2009, 2016). "Mapping Public Art in Ybor City" examines both of these subjects by contextualizing graffiti and street art within a larger public art context in a city that is rapidly gentrifying. Working with a historian, I can place graffiti history within a complex city history to co-create a course that asks large theoretical questions about the role of art in society. Another advantage of this course is that it fits nicely in the emerging Digital Humanities fields that are being celebrated (and financed) in colleges and universities throughout the country (Jones, 2013, Engel & Thain, 2015). Having a mapping project where students learn transferable computer literacies while working together as a group is both practical and skill-based learning that can benefit our students.

Digital humanities and mapping courses, though, often require institutional support where students have access to computer labs and (hopefully) IT professionals who can answer questions that arise. These courses are hands-on courses where students are building "things" (websites, platforms, etc.)—by their nature, the course needs to be run as a lab. It is prudent that students understand this aspect of the class before they sign up.

I am also an ardent believer in team-taught courses and this mapping course allows for a truly interdisciplinary endeavor. There are, of course, substantial roadblocks facing its implementation including course sizes to justify two professors' salaries, institutional willingness to allow for cross-disciplinary teaching opportunities and arraigning teaching schedules for two professors. Although we were able to navigate the first two roadblocks, we could not withstand the third. While the course has been approved and has received some internal funding for graduate students to assist with the digital labor, due to a sabbatical of the other professor, we will have to wait to offer this course until 2018.[10]

Teaching an undergraduate class entirely devoted to the subject of graffiti and street art

Instead of introducing graffiti and street art in a piecemeal fashion into one or more of his courses, Jeffrey Ian Ross offered an entire class on the subject matter. He taught this course two times over the space two different years. The class was established as a traditional lecture-based course, with a field trip, guest speakers, and assignments that encouraged the students to apply what they learned in the class and the readings by heading into the community, and incorporating photos of what they discovered into classroom discussions. The subjects covered during the semester included definitional and conceptual issues, the history of graffiti and street art, the reasons why individuals engage in graffiti and street art, reactions by various constituencies to this activity including law enforcement, and some discussion of culture jamming and adbusting.[11]

In my department, college and university, I have been known to teach classes that are not listed in the mandated curriculum and are therefore given "special topics" designations. Thus, I did not have to fight for acceptance to get a course on graffiti and street art approved. The

department allows instructors a fair amount of latitude in what they can teach and I was fortunate that my department was open to experimentation in new classes. Some of the challenges to teaching this course surrounded the method by which the content was delivered and methods of evaluation. These are discussed below.

Students: At around 20 students, the class size was manageable. Most of the students who enrolled in the class were criminal justice majors and did so because they were fulfilling an elective and not because they had a deep interest in graffiti and street art, or even vandalism. Students at my university typically come from working class backgrounds, and are disproportionately the first ones in their family who are going to university. A considerable number of students work either part time or full time, and some also work in the criminal justice system as front-line workers (e.g., correctional, parole, and police officers, or case workers). As such, they often enter the course with a traditional criminological/criminal justice viewpoint of what constitutes crime and a criminal. This is not to say the body of students are homogenous, the majority of my students are African Americans, followed by Whites, and then Hispanics.

Appropriate Text: Although some instructors may argue that a single text is not necessary for a course like this, and that you can get by with a number of articles taken from scholarly journals, or chapters from scholarly books, based on past experience, my students are most comfortable with a central book. Most books on the subject matter of graffiti and street art currently on the market are large format art books (e.g., Gastman & Neelon, 2010, etc.) are too narrowly focused, out of date, offer a limited perspective on graffiti and street art, and can be cost prohibitive. Finding an appropriate text that provides a wide overview was difficult. I settled on Anna Waclawek's book *Graffiti and Street Art* (2011). There are both advantages and disadvantages to this book and thus I supplemented this text with a number of scholarly articles that I sent the students electronically. As the semester developed, because of my impressions regarding what the students knew or did not know and absorbed, I added additional readings and in-class information gathering assignments. I found that it was helpful to create a website where appropriate articles could be downloaded with a minimum of difficulty.

Lectures: Most instructors in my school and college primarily lecture, and this mode of information delivery is one in which my students are comfortable. I used lectures to present a comprehensive account of graffiti and street crime including attempting to make sure that the students and I were on the same page with respect to definitional and conceptual, issues, famous writers/artists, and the history of graffiti and street art. The website (now dormant) also had definitions for terms and recommended readings.

Movies: Numerous commercial and documentary films featuring graffiti and street art as a backdrop or part of the plot have been produced (Ross, 2015). Choosing the most appropriate ones were difficult. Because of their contribution to the history of graffiti, I settled on the documentaries *Style Wars*, and *Wild Style*. One movie that I found particularly effective was *Exit Through the Gift Shop.* This film includes many of the contradictions of graffiti and street art. Many students, however, were confused by the purposeful obtuseness in the framing of the film and only saw it in a pure narrative form, rather than being more complex with different layers of meaning.

Guest Speakers: During the first time I taught the class, I used five guest speakers. They included scholars who had published on the field of graffiti and street art, a local law enforcement gang expert who monitors graffiti, and a street artist. Students were responsible for composing questions beforehand that they were responsible for asking after the guest had made a presentation. Two of the presenters came to class, while three of them gave their presentations through SKYPE technology. This later mode of instructional delivery had its advantages and disadvantages. Over time, students found this kind of method of delivery boring and they failed to become engaged. This may also be partially attributed to timing and method of delivery. The SKYPE lectures took place later in the semester after I believed that the students were more familiar with the material being discussed. Also, the lack of face-to-face contact meant that the human connections were more difficult.

Field Trip. One of the classes involved a visit to a legal graffiti alley that was very close to the university. We walked as a group to this spot that had been in operation since 2009. Located behind a theatre, it was a training ground for local graffiti and street artists, those who were passing through Baltimore, and had expanded with the owner's permission to the back alleys of two adjacent buildings and the pavement. The spot was also periodically used as performance space and a setting for fashion photographers and hip-hop videos. I used this field trip to help students understand the definitional complexities between legal and illegal graffiti.

Assignments. Although I considered having students get the feel of a spray can in their hands, I determined that this would be fraught with logistical challenges and/or was worried that it might backfire (i.e., one or more students would tell other faculty and community partners what we would be doing and it could be misinterpreted). Alternatively, after a couple of lectures dealing with definitional issues, and types of graffiti and street art, a lecture on street ethnography, plus the previously mentioned trip to the legal graffiti wall, I had students go out into the local community and take photographs of graffiti and street art. Students were then required to e-mail me the pictures to a dedicated e-mail address. In addition to the images, students were instructed to provide the date and exact location (i.e., street name, number and specific place) where the piece was found. In order to assist them in this assignment, I gave them detailed instructions. Shortly thereafter, we reviewed the images in class, trying to insure that the type of piece was correctly identified, and to extract themes connected to placement and content. (Eventually I wanted to have my students post/pin this information to a Google map, but was unable to do this as it was above my skill level at the time, and suspected that if I could not explain it to the students then they would have a difficult time performing this task too). In short, I did not have the IT help that would assist/train my students in pinning the location graffiti and street art on maps.

During the first time I taught this class, this process went smoothly. Many of my students had previously taken an introductory level criminal justice class with me, where I required them to do an ethnographic/observational assignment. I delimited the area where they were to take photos (a relatively safe part of town, surrounding the university). The second time I taught this class one of the students experienced a minor confrontation. Apparently, there had been a recent shooting (a not too uncommon activity in the city where I teach) and one or more residents chased the student. I surmised that these types of assignments could be relatively challenging depending on the gender and appearances of the student when they go out into the field to conduct the mini ethnographic data collection.

Another assignment involved having students do a review of a classic scholarly book on graffiti or street art (e.g., Castleman, 1984; Ferrell, 1996; Phillips, 1999; Macdonald, 2003; Snyder, 2009). My hope here was for students to have one last exposure to a book that had applied all the concepts that we discussed in the class but approaching the topic more narrowly. Most students were able to describe the content of the books, outline what they liked and in most cases what they had difficulties with. I positioned this assignment at the end of the semester so that students could benefit from the fuller impact of the information that was disseminated to them throughout the class.

Tests: Since many of my tests in my other classes consist of a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions, I decided to replicate this model. In general, as long as a study guide was provided, the students did relatively well in the multiple choice and short answer sections. When students approached the more analytical section (the requirements to write essays), they had considerable difficulty applying the concepts.

Evaluations: Some students thought that the material was too focused on art and art appreciation. One of the comments supporting this belief was the statement "since this is a criminal justice class make it criminal justice related, not art related (try to add gang related graffiti and laws etc.)". Other comments were more complimentary. One of the students said that because of the experience they now notice graffiti more, the different types, and the differences between graffiti and street art. Still many students valued the experience because they learned about the different graffiti and street artists and the purpose behind their work. Some of the students believed that the data collection project and visiting the legal graffiti wall gave a firsthand look as to the various degrees of artistic talent by different graffiti and street artists. Some believed that the main strengths of the course were the movies, the ethnographic study, and the trip to the legal graffiti wall.

Pros and Cons of teaching the entire course devoted to graffiti and street art

I chose to teach an entire class on the subject of graffiti and street crime because of my then deep interest in the subject matter and my belief that the topic deserved this kind of focus rather than in a piecemeal fashion. I also knew that it would be a challenge for many my students and I. The fact that it was a special topics course also allowed me a latitude to experiment as the semester developed. The lack of a course text was the most disconcerting to me. Now that a handful of other books (e.g., readers) have been published with some caveats outlined below, instructors might be able to use them.

Although my students were reasonably good at answering the basic multiple choice, short answer, and in-class essays, when they were asked to apply the theoretical information to fictional scenarios or to think of situations not discussed in class, they had considerable difficulties. Most of my students had difficulty seeing graffiti and street art beyond vandalism. In part, this could be due to the relatively little knowledge they generally have on issues of resistance, vandalism, and/or limited exposure to current events. Nonetheless, many of my students have difficulty understanding anything beyond the traditional understanding of crime and criminal justice and see any prosocial aspects of graffiti. Issues of resistance, oppression are often lost on them as most think that graffiti/street art is still gang graffiti.

I may have had expectations that exceeded what can be achieved given the context and setting. For a variety of reasons, I will probably not teach another class on graffiti and street art.

This is partially because my interests have slightly shifted, and somewhat because of what I perceive are the herculean obstacles of convincing criminal justice students about the importance of graffiti and street art beyond simply gang graffiti.

Future of courses on graffiti and street art: challenges and possibilities

Now that the auto-ethnographic experiences by the two authors and how they specifically incorporated graffiti and street art into their individual courses have been described, below we will discuss possibilities of future courses and the challenges and opportunities they pose.

Although Lennon has changed many things in the graffiti-themed assignments and courses, one thing that has not evolved as readily as it should have: the assignments and courses are still somewhat biased at looking at graffiti as "resistance" from a cultural studies perspective rather than examining it from a more holistic position that would include a criminology/criminal justice perspective. The author is suggesting changes to his curriculum because of the students he had in his courses who had urged him to think more legalistically about graffiti. Students entering a Humanities class often expect the course to deal with analytical readings of race, gender and class from an "identity" point of view; having a legal argument with input from law enforcement officers helps expand this framework. Ross ran into the opposite issue: his students worked through the material with a traditional criminology/criminal justice framework and had trouble grasping the subject from a cultural studies lens. In fact, Ross who taught the class solely focused on graffiti and street art has not taught the class in a couple of years and is doubtful that he will do it again. He found it an unnecessarily frustrating experience. This was largely because it was a constant struggle to convince students of the noncriminal aspects of the practice of graffiti and street art. The students seemed to be most alive when the subject of gang graffiti was discussed, while they had difficulty grasping and/or finding meaning in graffiti and street that was produced by writers/artists. Even though gang graffiti was contextualized through the readings and a law enforcement-gang graffiti expert, most students still believed that a disproportionate amount of graffiti that existed in this day and age was gang graffiti.

Both authors agree that more balance is needed. With multiple perspectives from different fields, students would get a more complex view of graffiti and street art and the subculture that engages in this activity. When teaching a course on graffiti and street art in the Humanities, for example, the course itself may be self-selecting, appealing more to students interested in graffiti as an aesthetic practice rather than to students who are interested in public policy or law enforcement. Keeping students off balance and expanding realms of thought rather than limiting parameters are, in our opinion, productive to generate both practical and analytical discussions. When we are "mapping" a city that deals with ephemeral and illegal art, it would behoove us to have guest speakers from the police and the community who are trying to limit exposure and longevity of some graffiti and street art. In fact, ideally, a team-taught course on graffiti and street art by a professor in criminology and a professor in the Humanities could create a learning environment that spoke to the different disciplinary needs of both types of students. Having these students working together on a group project could potentially be an ideal course that would push students into unknown territory and may perhaps lessen the significant challenge that both authors faced (in opposite ways) when teaching this course to our particular student populations.

We do, however, realize the immense challenges for creating an interdisciplinary course of this magnitude. But smaller changes could be more readily available—some we have tried,

others we anticipate implementing in the future. For example, criminal justice professors and law enforcement officers could guest lecture in a Humanities class. Criminal justice courses could, as one of the authors of this article did, include guest graffiti writers and street artists and include analytical essays on the myriad of reasons why people write graffiti or engage in Street Art. One way to ensure that these types of essays are available is by using readers. The two most recent readers, however, are very expensive for the typical student costing an average of $168.35 (USD).[12]

One other significant challenge and opportunity that we have not yet touched upon in this article is that in our courses, we are predominantly U.S.-centric (with a specific interest in East coast graffiti and street art). While we do discuss non-U.S. street artists like Banksy and large graffiti-centric movements (such as what happened in Egypt during the so-called Arab Spring), courses on graffiti and street art from a comparative global perspective are needed. Graffiti culture is a shared culture that electronically escapes narrow national boundaries and is truly a global subculture that has many practitioners learning from each other (Lennon 2014; MacDowall 2017). Although our courses have often been specifically place-based within the U.S. (with ethnographic assignments where students explore the cities where they are living), in future courses, Lennon will expand the parameters of his courses to track the ways that the vibrant global graffiti/street art community influences local scenes. This process is enabled by using social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, allowing students to trace emerging global styles and dialogue with graffiti writers/artists from around the globe.

Despite our best of intentions to integrate the subject matter using several different approaches, many of our students have difficulty applying the concepts to the examples of graffiti and street art they are exposed to. For both of us, we find that halfway through the semester students still have conceptual difficulty distinguishing among graffiti, street art and murals. Even understanding the differences among legal versus illegal, and sanctioned versus unsanctioned can prove challenging for many students to grasp. Similarly, some students are often unable to grasp the notion of vandalism as resistance or a political statement. It seemed as if at least a third of the class is laboring under popular definitions of the subject matter.

Conclusion

Our students are clearly interested in taking courses that deal with graffiti and street art. It also appears that the subject matter has become more accepted in universities as a serious subject of study. As the topic of graffiti and street art becomes more accepted within the academy, an increasing number of instructors may teach a class on this subject. What does the future hold for these types of courses? After a critical mass of scholars who do research on graffiti and street art has been formed, the authors might send them a questionnaire in order to better understand how they conduct their classes. Questions on these surveys may range from the kinds of materials they ask students to read, to impressions on how students benefited from taking the course, to teacher evaluations. Once the questionnaires are returned, we could compile the data to search for patterns of experiences, including opportunities and/or obstacles.

As seasoned scholars of graffiti and street art who have interacted with many researchers who also work in this field, we know of colleagues in the United States and elsewhere who would love to teach a class on this subject but are worried about perceptions of departmental members, the perennial demands of the curriculum, and dealing with students and faculty pre and misconceptions. Despite these obstacles, we hope that assignments and courses on graffiti and

street art will continue to be offered in the future, evolving in ways that mirror the subject matter that we teach: always fresh, edgy and innovative. We hope that our experience in this article gives some directions to maneuver around these roadblocks and to seize available opportunities to share our subject matter knowledge with our students.

Acknowledgments
We would like to thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this article.

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Notes

[1] Although there are numerous definitions of graffiti and street art the following ones are deemed sufficient for this paper. In general, graffiti "Typically refers to words, figures, and images that have been written, drawn and/ or painted on, and/or etched into or on surfaces where the owner of the property has NOT given permission." And street art refers to a wide. Range of expressions, including sculptures, installations, wall paintings and "Stencils, stickers, and artistic/noncommercial posters that are affixed to surfaces where the owner of the property has NOT given permission for the individual to place them on it. Can include words, figures, images and/or a combination of these" (Ross, 2016: 476-477).

[2] This article is not about the complementary subject of graffiti education which tends to take place in communities and presented as an alternative to street tagging (e.g., Nieviadomy, 2004; Hochtritt, 2008: Fusaro, 2011).

[3] We use the terms instructors and professors interchangeably throughout this paper.

[4] At a bare minimum, the success or failure, however defined, in instructing any class is dependent on a number of factors, including: the expertise of the professor, the sophistication of the students, and the organizational culture of the university. These criteria are embedded in a larger narrative that concerns the politics of teaching, and the perceptions of students and colleagues. Nowhere is this more evident than with controversial topics or nontraditional subjects.

[5] The authors were able to locate one book (Ganter, 2013), but it is geared to teaching graffiti and street art to school children. There are, however, courses being taught outside the U.S. that are specifically about graffiti/street art, including at the University of Edinburgh, University of Melbourne, University of Ottawa, Concordia University, and John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. For more information, see, for example, Avramidis & Tsilimpounidi (2017, p. 20).

[6] See, for example, http://ctl.yale.edu/teaching/ideas-teaching/teaching-controversial-topics.

[7] In order for a program to be certified (not accredited), the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, one of the two major learned societies in the field of criminology/criminal justice, requires all tenured professors to teach the required classes in the curriculum.

[8] For a review of terms used in the study and practice of graffiti and street art the reader can consult Ross (2016: Glossary, 475-479).

[9] You can access the video, 'Lakeland, Fl Graffiti Documentary" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc0apfy0tLI. Accessed: February 8, 2018.

[10] I understand the privileges afforded to working in a research university with its low teaching loads and available resources for technology and assistantships. I am trying to take advantage of many opportunities. As discussed, I did many of these assignments when working in a non-research college with high teaching loads and no resources for technology. Types of assignments and course will, of course, be adjusted to the specific university/college one is a part of.

[11] Adbusting is "[a] type of 'culture jamming' where individuals or groups purposely distort the advertised message of a business or corporation to create a different, sometimes humorous message" (Ross, 2016, p. 475). Culture Jamming on the other hand, is generally understood to be the "Disruption, distortion, subversion, and/or damage to publicly displayed cultural artifacts/icons/signs, including advertising, to create a different sometimes humorous or mocking message" (Ross, 2016, p. 476).

[12] According to the National Association of College Stores, the average price for class texts is $67.
https://www.nacs.org/advocacynewsmedia/StudentSpendingInfographics.aspx.
Information downloaded March 9, 2017.

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