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Alice I. Whiteside. Reconciling Vocabularies: Making Connections between Studio Art and Library Research. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. July, 2010. 39 pages. Advisor: Jeffrey Pomerantz

This study explores the role of library research in the studio art curriculum, contributing to the scholarly discourse on the information needs of art students. Raising the concern that previous studies simplify the creative process and conflate a wide range of information needs under the umbrella term "inspiration," this study examines the role of research in student work through a content analysis of recent studio art thesis statements at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The content analysis demonstrates that studio art students are engaged in a high level of inquiry in their creative projects and that they draw from a wide range of information sources to support this inquiry, including scholarly print material. It also shows areas in which this population could benefit from library instruction.

Headings:

College and university libraries/ Relations with faculty and curriculum

Art/ Information services

Art research

Information needs/ Evaluation

RECONCILING VOCABULARIES:
MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STUDIO ART AND LIBRARY RESEARCH

by
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
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Approved by

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Introduction

I recently helped an undergraduate student with the scanner at the Sloane Art Library; she was capturing an image from a non-circulating book to take to her painting class. It was a Sunday afternoon, quiet in the library, and she was a chatty patron. She told me not just the bare-bones of her assignment but talked about what she planned to do with the image, why she had chosen this particular print, and so forth. After she left, I realized that I had acquired a wealth of information that could have helped me help her far beyond showing her how to use the scanner: she had explicitly conveyed her interest in a particular topic, the limits of her knowledge within the topic, and what she aimed to accomplish with the relevant material she found. This not-so-unique scenario illustrates the heart of my current inquiry: How can the library better serve studio art students? What information can we gather from what they are already saying that could help us to achieve this goal?

If we have a better understanding of a certain user population's needs, we can presumably offer services that will better meet those needs. While the library and information science (LIS) professional literature on the information-seeking behavior of artists and art students is sparse, it suggests a consistent model pointing to significant types of information that art students need (Hemmig, 2008). Two tenets of this model are that the nature of art students' inquiry is interdisciplinary and that they often engage in browsing as a primary search strategy. A review of qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as articles drawing on anecdotal evidence, reveals five classes of information that

artists seek: inspirational information, specific visual information, technical information, information about trends and events in the art world, and business information (Cobbledick, 1996). The first of these, inspirational information, seems to encompass all information that informs the content of artwork and, as such, is a very broad category. While Cobbledick's model offers a slightly more complex view than "Artists use books for two primary reasons: to obtain technical information and to find inspiration" (Gregory, 2007, p. 57), both of these assessments provide limited information of use to the librarian developing collections and services.

In the context of creative practice, seeking "inspirational information" could refer equally to untargeted browsing or to researching in-depth information about an idea, theory, place, or event. When a humanities scholar peruses what others have written on a particular topic, s/he is also, in a sense, reading for inspiration, but we do not usually call it this. While research takes different forms in the studio, this study illustrates how the search for inspiration can involve serious library research. Undergraduate students in all disciplines are developing their research skills as they tackle assigned papers and projects, and academic librarians are increasingly taking on the role of teaching these skills. Where do these skills fit into studio art projects?

While studies of the information-seeking behavior of artists and art students provide a valuable starting point, the role of the library (and librarian) in relation to studio art curricula is largely absent from the professional literature. In one relevant article, Bennett (2006) discusses her success in reaching out to studio departments through student focus groups and giving guest lectures in studio classes. She touches on unique challenges in working with art students, noting, "These students do not recognize their

own valid and extremely challenging research needs" (p. 38). It appears from the literature that sometimes even librarians do not recognize these needs; for example, Reed and Tanner (2001) conclude that "Library services and collections may be more relevant to history/literature courses rather than the performance and studio courses" (p. 232-233). Academic libraries are in the business of supporting research. As a librarian, I have experience and expertise in helping an art history student conduct research for a paper, but my training has not included how to help a studio art student find inspiration. However, if studio art students are conducting research, then library services and collections are clearly relevant to their coursework.

In an effort to explore the role of research in "inspiration" and, more broadly, in the studio art classroom, I closely examined a sample of students' work at my home institution, conducting a content analysis of recent graduate and undergraduate honors studio art thesis statements from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). These thesis statements are essays written in conjunction with a thesis exhibition; they are largely process papers, reflecting on the work that was completed and what went into it. The content analysis explores studio art students' information sources and research methods in their thesis exhibition projects. It seeks to answer the following research questions: What types of sources are these students using? What methods of gathering information do they discuss?

To contextualize these examples of student work in both academia and the arts, I examined core competencies for art students and current scholarship on creative arts practice as research. The goal of this study is not to define research (or inspiration) in students' studio practice but rather, by looking at student work within the context of

curricular goals as well as the theory of practice, I hope to enrich the professional discussion of the research practices and information needs of studio art students. The language used to discuss studio art research in the professional and scholarly literature is very different; accreditation standards and other core competencies use yet another set of vocabulary, and all of these differ from how students discuss their own projects. This paper aims to reconcile these disparate vocabularies in a discussion addressing the complex information needs of art students and the role that the library can play in their education.

Literature Review

The Information-Seeking Behavior of Artists and Art Students

The first published study of the information needs of art students was Toyne's (1975) analysis of user requests at the Falmouth School of Art. Having been charged with developing the school's first library, Toyne built a collection largely from guesswork and then sought to assess what materials students were actually using. Documenting all requests over a period of two months, he notes that students asked for materials on a wide range of subjects, a significant number of which were not related to specific artists. In a follow up article, Toyne (1977) emphasizes the need for multidisciplinary materials in a library that serves art students and also notes that art students seem to harbor an antipathy toward scholarly research. Pacey (1982), using an anecdotal approach, also notes art students' need for multidisciplinary sources; he observes that art students are compulsive browsers and that visual information may be more important to them than textual information. He voices the opinion that artists and art students can get by without

libraries but that they can also benefit from them.

In 1985, Day and McDowell conducted small group interviews with art students from one school. Their findings included that these students liked to browse, they used materials from a wide range of sources, and they turned to the library for specific image needs. Overall, the students' comments corroborated Pacey's observations, including that the students found the library useful but not essential. Frank (1999) also conducted group interviews with art students (from several schools in Minnesota) and reached similar conclusions as Day and McDowell. Both Frank and Day and McDowell interviewed students who used the library, potentially excluding the needs and opinions of students who do not use the library.

Literature on the information seeking behavior of practicing artists intersects with studies of art students and also reveals some librarians' biases about this population. In 1987, Dane, observing that no studies had yet addressed the information seeking behavior of professional artists, discusses artists' use of a public library; drawing on his own experience, he emphasizes the library as a gathering place for artists. Stam (1995) presents a very different view of artists as library users; she surveyed librarians about artists' use of information sources, justifying her method with the observation that "artists are not easy to get hold of" (p. 21). While documenting, as others have, that artists use a range of materials and frequently engage in browsing as a search strategy, she also presents a stereotype that artists are not very good communicators. Van Zijl and Gerischke (2001) present a similar bias in their methodology; in their study of artists in South Africa, they chose to survey only those who were also educators, deeming these the more "information-literate" artists (p. 3).

Cobbledick (1996) paved the way towards a more systematic study of artists' information needs. Drawing from previous literature, she outlined five classes of information that artists seek: inspirational information, specific visual information, technical information, information about trends and events in the art world, and business information. She then conducted interviews with four practicing artists (all art faculty at a university), and used the information she gathered to develop an instrument for future studies. A significant aspect of Cobbledick's study is that, although still library-centric in many ways, she acknowledges non-library information sources such as life experience. Hemmig (2009) conducted a larger survey of practicing artists within one community, using an adaptation of Cobbledick's instrument, and his findings corroborated her model.

While most of these studies have investigated what types of sources are important to artists and what information needs motivate them, Littrell (2001) was primarily interested in student and faculty perceptions of the library. Her study covers fine arts, performing arts, and fashion design. Based on informal interviews and observation, Littrell's findings align with previous studies; both students and faculty placed importance on browsing for information, including looking for inspiration and ideas. She notes that students are more likely to also seek out information about their discipline. A few studies have focused explicitly on art faculty, with the aim of improving services to this group and through them to the students. Surveys of art faculty include Powell (1995), which, although older, is of interest since it was also conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Reed and Tanner (2001), and Gregory (2007). With slight variations of preference for periodicals vs. books, the findings in these studies do not differ greatly from the literature already discussed.

Lamenting the library-centric nature of the existing literature, and our consequently shallow understanding of artists' information-seeking behavior and needs, Cowan (2004) conducted a series of phone interviews with one artist and used a hermeneutic framework to explore this artist's information seeking. One of her resulting observations is that the artist she spoke with did not view her creative process as a process of seeking information. Rather, as Cowan explains, "her processes…rely on the action of creating understanding" (p. 19). Differing conceptions of information seeking, and the vocabulary used to describe it, can be a central issue when it comes to connecting with patrons. Cowan succeeds in stepping beyond the limited information available through surveys, but with a sample of one her findings have limited applicability.

Many of these studies are now dated and do not shed light on the role of the Internet in current students' information seeking behavior. In their discussion of the Millennial generation, Zanin-Yost and Tapley (2008) state that 73% of college students in the United States use the Internet as a major research tool. Koopmans (2009), in her study of how artists use the Internet in their practice, found that this use focused on finding information related to exhibiting and selling work; they also sought information online about technical information and source imagery.

Library Outreach to Studio Art Departments

While studies on the information needs of art students are limited, articles addressing outreach to studio art departments are even fewer. Reed and Tanner (2001) discuss liaison activity in connection with their survey of art faculty, but they conclude that "Library services and collections may be more relevant to history/literature courses

rather than the performance and studio courses" (p.232-233). The same year, Atkins (2001) used part of her sabbatical to sit in on studio art classes (from fine arts to performing arts) and developed the opposite opinion. While she observes rich opportunities for information literacy instruction, her recommendation that art librarians should regularly sit in on classes may not be feasible for many professionals. The amount of time she was able to devote to this activity was dependent on the fact that she was on sabbatical and therefore liberated from other daily duties.

Describing a handful of case studies of outreach to studio classrooms, Bennett (2006) reinforces the viewpoint that the library has a great deal to offer to these students. She has had success reaching out to studio students through student focus groups and giving guest lectures in studio classes. Her efforts highlight introducing students to different collections and teaching effective search strategies.

Zanin-Yost and Tapley (2008) describe their efforts at Western Carolina University to collaborate with art faculty in introducing information literacy concepts into arts classrooms, including one example involving an undergraduate studio art class. They share relevant teaching moments and interesting solutions to different challenges in the classroom, but the studio class they discuss is an art appreciation class in which the students have to write a research paper. While this is a reminder that the studio art curriculum does include academic writing assignments, Zanin-Yost and Tapley do not address how the library supports studio assignments, which comprise the bulk of this curriculum. I am interested in the research process that feeds into studio work as well as academic writing, and I have found a discussion of this largely missing from the literature.

Art Practice as Research

New literature examining creative art practice as research offers rich ground for discussion of the education of art students within a liberal arts university setting. This scholarly discussion began in 1989 when the UK Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) said that practice (not just reflection on practice) was a legitimate component of a research degree (Gray & Malins, 2004, p. 8). The decision served to level the playing field for funding opportunities and to include studio practice in the academic definition of research. Scholars have since tried to define what studio practice means as research. Much of this literature is geared toward faculty and graduate students who have to explicitly demonstrate or defend their practice as research, and the debate has been fueled by the advent of PhD programs for studio art in the UK and Australia. The literature reflects efforts to define creative arts methods and methodologies, which Gray and Malins (2004) call “largely uncharted” (p. x).

In one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject, Sullivan (2010) in *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* sets forth an eloquent examination of what research means within the studio. His core argument is that art generates new knowledge and that methodologies specific to visual art can transform human understanding in ways as profound as scientific research. In broad terms, as Sullivan explains, methodologies of art practice differ from

> traditional research methodology, which in quantitative studies is linear, iterative, and confirmatory, and which in qualitative inquiries is cyclical, emergent, and discovery oriented. Visual arts research, on the other hand, is dynamic, reflexive, and fluid as creative and critical practices are used to shed new light on what is known and to consider the possibility of what is not. (Sullivan, 2010, p. 192)

Critique is an essential component of academic visual arts programs and of professional

art practice. Sullivan describes the reflexive inquiry as a process of working through a material problem and then returning to the topic or issue the artist is addressing with the critical lens of new awareness gained through the art practice.

Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry, edited by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007), defends the place of creative arts practice within the academy and provides a guide for artists working within an academic setting. Barrett highlights art practices as "alternative modes of understanding the world and of revealing new knowledge" (p. 160). If studio practice is acknowledged as research in its own right, then the written exegesis required in academic studio programs may seem superfluous. However, as Bolt asserts, there is value in "articulating what has emerged or what has been realized through the process of handling materials and ideas, and what this emergent knowledge brings to bear on the discipline" (p. 34). She feels that writing about the process and product is particularly important for any artist working within the context of a university or college, as the exegesis places the project within a scholarly discourse. For art faculty, there may be added value in articulating their research in academic terms for gaining funding and recognition. Bolt views the written element as another way of propagating the new knowledge created by the artwork.

Barrett and Bolt observe that art practice is, by nature, experiential and action- and problem-based learning (p. 3). The pedagogy of these methods is based on the idea that "If information is to be used effectively, it must be translated into the learner's way of attempting to solve a problem" (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2009, p. 94). With an increasing interest in experiential learning, there is a recognition that studio practice and methods of inquiry can be applicable and beneficial in other types of classrooms. Snyder

et al. (2009) describe the use of creative arts practices in educating information professionals, noting that "tactics of creativity are teachable through practice." (p. 1923). They also cite empirical studies that suggest "artistic ways of thinking and knowing can contribute to cognitive growth and development" (p. 1924). Regardless of what type of classroom it occurs in, this learning does not exist in isolation from scholarly discussion and materials.

While it has been successfully argued that artists are engaging in serious inquiry and producing new knowledge, there remains a disconnect between methods of inquiry in the art classroom and mainstream ideas of academic inquiry, and, subsequently, between modes of learning in the art classroom and how the library is usually presented. The literature emphasizes material research and how it generates new ways of relating to and understanding the world. Also, however, it is apparent that artists draw on sources outside of their studio and materials in the course of their research, and we know that these sources vary widely. At the very least, we can assert that there are some methods of inquiry that are unique to art practice, and that artists are familiar with rigorous inquiry.

The literature has introduced several new terms such as "practice-led research," "research-led practice," "research practitioner," and "artist/researcher." In addition, volumes such as the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* discuss the application of creative arts practice within different research methodologies (Knowles & Cole, 2008). This further complicates the term "research," which in this discussion could now refer to art practice as research in itself, art practice as one part of a qualitative research study, or, in the more general sense, the discovery and use of external sources (potentially in a library or through library services). I am most interested in the first of these, and how it

intersects with the last.

Core Competencies for Art Students

Regardless of the discipline or method, research skills are learned. It is useful to understand what types of information art students are looking for and how they are seeking it, but at times students may not know what information they need or have the skills to determine this. Librarians have become increasingly active in teaching information literacy skills in order to help students succeed in their academic endeavors as well as to foster lifelong learning habits; also, these skills are important in many accreditation standards. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Standards (2000) specify that an information literate student should be able to determine the need for information, locate the information effectively and efficiently, evaluate the information s/he finds, use it effectively, and use it ethically and legally.

These standards have a clear (at least to librarians) place within the core competencies for students identified in the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) accreditation standards. Art majors graduating with a liberal arts degree must fulfill the expectations of this degree, which generally involves being able to think critically and communicate effectively, and to "respect, understand, and evaluate work in a variety of disciplines" (NASAD, 2009, p. 80). In addition, NASAD specifies that, upon graduation, students majoring in art ought to have "a developed visual sensitivity," "the technical skills, perceptual development, and understanding of principles of visual organization sufficient to achieve basic visual communication and

expression in one or more media," and the "ability to make workable connections between concept and media" (p. 80). Critical thinking and effective communication form the core of these competencies.

In support of developing these competencies in students, NASAD accreditation standards specify the necessity of a library in degree-granting institutions. They state that this library should explicitly "support both the number and scope of curricular objectives" and that library policies "should be developed in a manner that demonstrates coordination between the library staff and the art/design faculty" (p. 56). Further, they recommend: "There should be a close administrative relationship among all libraries within the institution so that art/design students and faculty may make the best use of library resources" (p. 56). This indicates a recognition of the wide variety of resources that may be useful to students. Based on these standards and competencies, the role of the librarian in the studio arts curriculum might include introducing students to collections and resources, teaching searching and evaluation skills, and educating students about the proper documentation of sources. Educating students about copyright and proper citation could also encompass information about their rights within fair use (regarding the appropriation of materials) and as regards their own intellectual property.

To gain further insight into the UNC Art Department's expectations for studio student work, I read the studio art program description and faculty members' teaching philosophies. The program description does not provide specific curricular goals, but it does state:

> The Studio Art faculty emphasize craftsmanship and the acquisition of the technical skills students will need to express their visual ideas. The faculty also encourages students to take advantage of the many resources offered by UNC-Chapel Hill as they cultivate their intellectual curiosity and develop a broad base

of knowledge to inform their work." (UNC Art Department, 2010)

These points are reiterated in individual faculty member's statements. In her teaching philosophy, elin o'Hara slavic emphasizes that she encourages her students "to find their own voice, opinion, and vision, to develop it visually, and to articulate their ideas and formal decisions." She notes the fact that many of her students are not art majors, and those who are majors are also taking a wide range of classes in other disciplines to fulfill the requirements of a liberal arts degree. Beth Grabowski, in her Pedagogy statement, also addresses teaching art in a university context. She touches on the challenge of teaching "a different mode of thinking and working" as well as the benefit of an arts curriculum within a liberal arts context, since "to be interested in the world on many levels is an essential component for the artist." Both of these teaching philosophies reflect a commitment to engaging students in a deep level of inquiry.

Method

In order to address the question of how library resources and services fit into studio art curricula, I am attempting to bring into one room, so to speak, multiple discourses that touch on this issue. My methodology is two-fold, consisting of the literature review in the previous section, which explores diverse sources addressing academic studio art practice, and a content analysis of recent undergraduate and graduate studio art theses from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The idea behind this approach is that a more comprehensive view of research in the studio art context will yield a new understanding that is greater than the sum of these distinct conversations. A careful look at the relevant library literature, critical studies of art practice as research,

relevant core competencies, and examples of student work show that these sources, although they all relate to art practice in an academic setting, intersect only obliquely. Taken together, however, they can help us work towards a more complex and thorough understanding of how the library can support the studio art curriculum.

Examples of student work are perhaps the trickiest element to bring into this discussion; they are also the most important. In order to develop library collections and services that target studio art students effectively, it is essential that we cultivate an understanding of what these students are actually doing. The existing literature approaches this question with surveys and interviews, methods that are appropriate for documenting a phenomenon that is not directly observable. However, as Bennett (2006) comments, studio art students sometimes “do not recognize their own valid and extremely challenging research needs” (p. 38). Reflecting on this difficulty, I decided to examine student projects to gain insight into what information sources they are using and to try to translate their working process into library language. Previous studies that ask students about their information needs have shed scant light on the challenges of bridging the library-studio divide; our questions and their answers seem to be leaving something out. This study takes a new approach, asking what we can learn from what students are already saying.

Studio art theses present a unique opportunity for examining student work because they are process papers. Written to accompany a body of work that makes up the student’s thesis project, each thesis statement addresses the processes, sources, ideas, and methodologies that went into the thesis work on exhibit. One of the advantages of conducting a content analysis of these theses is availability, tapping into information that

is readily and publicly available. As Krippendorff (1980) comments, all reading is qualitative and involves interpretation (p. 19-20); content analysis introduces a systematic and consistent method of gathering data from text, reducing the subjectivity of inferences and drawing out patterns and themes.

In this study, I read recent undergraduate and graduate studio art theses from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and coded these for sources of information and topics explored. Through a process of open coding, I recorded types of sources used, topics investigated or explored, and statements that explained process and method or that explicitly addressed research or inspiration (see Coding Scheme in Appendix). The sample encompasses the most recent five years for which studio art theses are available, from 2005-2009; it includes thirty-four graduate and twenty undergraduate projects. This number proved sufficient to reach a point of saturation, where themes were recurring and no significant new information was introduced with additional theses. The thesis statements are publicly available in both the Sloane Art Library and the North Carolina Collection at UNC. At the Sloane Art Library, the MFA theses are housed in large binders, with all of the projects from a specific year in one binder. The undergraduate honors theses are individually bound and organized alphabetically by last name. The theses are only available in print; the content analysis was therefore hand-coded.

This study does not aim to result in generalizable findings about what sources art students use; rather, it generates significant information about the sources that some art students have used. The study is limited by the fact that it draws from one school and that, while all MFA students must complete a thesis, only undergraduates who are enrolled in the honors program complete a thesis exhibition and essay. The sample is

therefore not representative of all studio art students at UNC; it is biased towards the most high-achieving students.

Disadvantages of this method include the limitations of the sample as well as what information can be legitimately inferred from these texts. While the theses document sources used in the students' projects, they do not usually provide insight into where these sources were accessed or the role of the library in students' working process. In addition to documentation of sources used, the theses offer anecdotal insight into how students conceptualize the concepts of research and inspiration. Since no tests were conducted for inter-coder reliability, the reliability of the results is dependent on my consistency throughout the coding process.

The intent of this study is to introduce a fresh perspective on student work in the discussion of how the library can best support this work. Comparing the results of the content analysis against core competencies for art students will generate ideas about appropriately targeted training for studio art students at UNC. Measuring the results against the current literature on the information seeking behavior of art students will show how closely this sample of students' work aligns with those findings. Presumably, the content analysis of theses will produce more in-depth information than previous studies that rely on checklists of material. While the conclusions that I draw from this sample will not be generalizable to all art schools, they may lead to new ideas about how the art library can best reach out to studio art students, which other librarians can assess in the context of their own libraries. My goal is to create a richer and more fruitful discussion of this topic.

Findings

MFA Theses

The MFA thesis exhibitions were created in a range of media, including painting, photography, sculpture, multimedia, printmaking, drawing, installation, and performance. As expected, the artists discussed a very wide range of sources for their ideas, including personal experience, fiction, children's literature, comic books, nature, man-made objects, history, memory, popular culture, politics, film, pornography, current events, ritual, other artists' work, art criticism, environmental issues, physics, sociology, and psychology. This list is representational rather than exhaustive. The treatment of some topics reveals a deep level of research, while others served as a springboard for personal reflection.

All of the MFA students discussed or quoted notable artists. One student wrote of contemporary artists who were influential for her: "In knowing and appreciating their work, I am able to weave their history into my process and still have my own voice" (Landwehr, 2005, p. 13). Another elaborated that "Investigating the work of celebrated artists… helped me understand what qualities my work already had and where my work can go" (Grisales, 2009, p. 8). These comments offer a window into how these artists are, in a sense, building on previous work, although in a manner different from academic scholarship.

Commonly cited theoretical texts included Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, Bourriand's theory of relational aesthetics, and the writings of Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and John Berger. Out of the thirty-four, all but three students drew from written texts in their artistic research. Thirty-one cited scholarly books, and twenty-two

cited scholarly articles. Five students used online sources, most of which appeared reliable. One website that seemed questionable was no longer available when I investigated it further. Other sources referenced in the bibliographies included films, personal interviews, lectures, fiction, and comic books. While the clarity of the writing varied, there was only one thesis that I found very difficult to read and decipher. The majority presented complex paths of inquiry and well-reasoned explanations of goals and methods. Overall, the MFA students generally included thorough citations for the works they referenced. However, five out of the thirty-four had sloppy or missing citations.

Nine of the thirty-four students made explicit statements about conducting research on topics that informed their projects. Topics highlighted in this manner included Rudolf Steiner's work, costume in film, relational aesthetics, Fluxus, the history of graphic novels, torture, and the Unabomber. Other MFA students used the term "research" in connection with their material practice. For example, a drawing student wrote, "As I was doing my research for this piece [*The Body Factory*], I became fascinated with the disturbing nature that the bodies resembled meat on hooks" (Cash, 2007, p. 5). In other instances, the nature of the research is less clear. One student commented, "Researching and making for my artwork have not given me definite answers" (Vega-Forero, 2008, p. 3); research here could refer to processes in the studio or to gathering information outside of the studio.

Many of the MFA students discussed the importance of process in their work. The idea of creation as an intellectually generative process appears in one student's statement that

> The very act of painting is an experience in itself – like taking a long walk in an unfamiliar place; you don't know where you'll end up but you keep walking with

> the faith that you will find your way back to where you began. When you arrive, you have a fuller awareness of your surroundings. (Paroubek, 2009, p. 12)

Some students went into more detail about the discoveries they made through the art making process. A printmaker working in woodcuts explained how the task of carving brings her attention to the work in new ways: “all lines are carved with equal importance. I become aware of how pattern functions and aids in the movement through the work. I become aware of and use pattern both to unify and separate space” (Huffman, 2009, p. 8). One photographer discussed a sequence of projects through which he attempted to address a topic that drew his interest (American consumerism) and why his first attempts were ineffective (Forer, 2008).

I was particularly interested to read statements about inspiration within the context of the many sources that the students were drawing on. One student titled her bibliography, which listed seven books, “Sources of Inspiration.” A painter, who discussed fairy tales, physics (specifically, the theory of wave-particle duality), Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, neurology, and early anthropological drawings as information that informed her work, went on to state: “In my experience, art does not begin with an idea or particular concept. Paintings result from an accumulation of discourse between the painting and the painter” (Esposito, 2008, p. 13). While, for her, the painting does not begin with a specific idea, she is nonetheless bringing to this discourse a wide variety of information. Other students were more explicit about how various sources informed their work; one sculptor wrote, “In my arguments thus far, I have attempted to weave the various reasoning for incorporating certain materials, mediums, codes, art historical references, and concepts to support my work’s formal manifestations” (Reagan, 2008, p. 13).

Students did not usually elaborate on their methods of finding information, but there is evidence that their information-gathering processes ranged from incidental information gathering to personal interviews to library research. I interpreted the statement "I was reminded of their discussion when reading the March 2005 issue of *Modern Painters*…" as an instance of incidental information gathering (Crosby, 2005, p. 3). Students also discussed ideas prompted by reading works of fiction or children's literature. In one instance, a student commented explicitly on library resources:

> I am now connected to academic literature of which I was previously unaware. This academic material is not on Proquest, the database I was most familiar with and had been led to believe was the premier search engine of periodical literature. These academic journals are not in Barnes & Noble, they are not in public libraries, and I was not aware of any artists who are concerned with these contemporary issues. (Grisales, 2009, p. 8)

This statement illuminates the potential benefits of connecting students to library resources.

BA and BFA Honors Theses

The undergraduate honors theses differed in ways that one would expect undergraduate and graduate level work to differ. In the BA and BFA honors theses, the bibliographies were not as robust and the engagement with theory was more tentative. However, as I read through these essays, I was struck by the extent to which the majority of the students were engaging with and building on others' work; a high level of energy and commitment to inquiry are evident.

As with the MFA students, the undergraduate honors projects included a wide range of media, including photography, painting, drawing, fiber arts, video, and multimedia installations. All of the undergraduate students discussed specific works by

artists they admire, critical writings about the artists' works, and/or writings produced by the artists themselves. Different students also identified film, music, poetry, and fiction as important sources for ideas. Personal experiences and the natural world were common, and other sources of information included an interview with a fellow artist, a short film, and medical or scientific sources.

Seventeen of the twenty theses cited scholarly print sources. One of the remaining referred to a scholarly theorist but did not provide a citation. The other two theses lacked bibliographies and citations; in these papers, the students referred generally to artists they found inspiring but otherwise discussed personal experience and did not draw on outside sources. Of the seventeen that used scholarly sources, all referenced books and six referenced scholarly articles. Eight students cited online sources (excluding article databases); these ranged in quality from museum websites to Wikipedia. Three students cited Wikipedia articles on topics for which they could have easily used another reference source (e.g. graffiti, mail art). *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and *On Longing* by Susan Stewart were both cited by many of the students, indicating that these are core texts for this group.

Several undergraduate students also discussed processes as a source for furthering their understanding of their subject. In these projects, processes encompassed a broader range of activities, including exploration (walking in the woods, walking around a city), mimicking or approximating (recreating an environment), or learning a new skill or procedure to contribute to their project (creating a killing jar, learning to use a sewing machine or weave a rug). These methods all involve learning through doing. In one performance art project, the artist's exploration is shared through video documentation of

processes such as plucking his eyebrows or getting drunk (Jerch, 2006).

Only a few of the undergraduate theses explicitly discussed research. In one notable example, Rodemann, in *Frontal Assault: A Photographic Investigation into Body Image Issues in College Age Women*, writes

> I could not have even begun to tackle these issues without having myself studied those who wrote on it in the past. Before I got very into the project, I was researching theories on how society and the media inform women's views of their bodies. (Rodemann, 2008, p. 5)

The term research was also employed in relation to creative practice; for example, in a discussion of her series of photographs, one student related, "Through my research I encountered the problem of whether I am aestheticizing horror by taking pictures of the grotesque in beautiful ways" (Tran, 2007, p. 5). Additionally, some students discussed aspects of research without labeling it as such. One student, discussing the influence of Joseph Cornell and Gerhardt Richter, stated, "I too was evaluating, differentiating, arranging, and cross-referencing information and materials I had been collecting, both physically and mentally" (Theriault, 2008, p.7). Collecting, evaluating, arranging, and drawing connections also describes the research process.

While the students demonstrate serious engagement with their research process, nine out of twenty undergraduate theses had sloppy or absent citations. Seven of the theses had instances of sloppy or missing in-text citations, and two theses lacked references of any kind. One thesis listed only one item in the bibliography; this single item was the only source the author quoted directly, but she discussed other sources in her text that should have been listed in the bibliography.

Discussion

In accordance with the previous literature on the information-seeking behavior of artists, art students at UNC draw from a wide range of topics within their projects. Hemmig's (2008) remark that students are likely to find the work of prominent artists important is corroborated in this sample of student work; all of the thesis statements reference other artists' work in some manner. In addition to drawing from interdisciplinary sources, the theses reveal a range of types of sources, including multimedia sources (film, music, specific artworks, and non-art images), personal interviews, and personal experience. The majority of the sources referenced were print, including scholarly and non-scholarly materials. Use of the information varied between prompting an idea (which I would term inspiration) to aiding in the development of an idea or furthering an understanding of a topic (which I would call research).

The reoccurrence of certain texts cited in the theses suggests a shared vocabulary among the art students at UNC. As further evidence of this, elin o'Hara slavick writes in her teaching philosophy that she uses core texts such as Berger's *Ways of Seeing* to engage students in a dialogue with their experience of creating and encountering art. Since the students are taking classes together and presumably being introduced to many of these theorists within those classes, it is not surprising that they draw on common sources. It is a reminder, however, of the role of these theorists within the discipline of visual arts. Students' references to the work of influential artists contribute to this shared vocabulary. Furthermore, while less concrete, the students employ similar terminology in discussing their projects. They discuss exploration (from exploring ideas to exploring materials), developing understanding, learning new processes and techniques, and the strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches to a topic. Many express enthusiasm,

and some articulate the process of elucidating an idea through intellectual and creative investigation.

While the students do not usually state where they found books, articles, and other sources, it is clear that they used materials that they could access in the library. Reed and Tanner (2001) note that studio art faculty have personal libraries and may share these materials with students (p. 232). Published descriptions and discussions of artist studios also indicate that many practicing artists maintain personal libraries (Jacob & Grabner, 2010). While practicing artists may have developed personal libraries, students are unlikely to have the means to do so. The fact that the library has a role to play in art students' education is asserted by the NASAD accreditation standards, which specify that degree granting art and design schools must have a library.

Cowan (2004) stresses the fact that the information needs of practicing artists may not be fully or even primarily served by libraries. The artist that she interviewed emphasized personal experience, other artists' work, and information gathered from fellow artists as being important to her work. The theses show that in this sample of student work at UNC, serious library research is not appropriate for all projects, but it is essential to some. Even for projects that depended primarily on personal experience or observation, however, students identified the importance of learning about other artists' work, and their citations indicate that they achieve this primarily through print sources. The projects that were grounded in personal experience or observation raise the issue that information gathered may not always be directly integrated into the artwork, but it nonetheless informs the work. Other projects were more research heavy and directly integrated materials from external sources.

A difference between professionals in the arts and scholars in other fields is that, in most cases, an artist's audience does not care where s/he gathered information for inspiration or research. In the humanities, sound research practices are emphasized because scholars are held accountable for them. Practicing artists may or may not incorporate in-depth research in their projects, but either way they are not expected to produce a bibliography for a gallery exhibition. However, student work differs because they are new to the field and are learning the basics; assignments are designed to build skills that will serve students in their future efforts. While they may not need to conduct a literature review for an art project, they almost always need to find and use information. For art students at UNC, significant emphasis is placed on technical skills and visual expression; the students are also, however, expected to "develop a broad base of knowledge to inform their work" (UNC Art Department, 2010). Information literacy skills serve as the foundation of building knowledge. The students working on thesis exhibitions did, in fact, produce bibliographies, and the content analysis of their thesis statements reveals areas in which these students could benefit from information literacy instruction.

In the sample of theses, students were more likely to turn to books than to articles. This could indicate that books are more important to artists; however, it could also indicate that the students were not familiar with navigating article databases or did not look in periodicals. Approximately 65% of the graduate students cited scholarly articles, while only about 30% of the undergraduate students did. For those who did not cite articles, the question remains whether they looked and did not find anything relevant or whether they did not look. This is equally applicable to the few students who did not cite

any sources. The fact that the majority of undergraduate students did not refer to articles suggests that at least some of these students might not have looked for them. Returning to the ACRL Information Literacy Standards, this opens the question of whether the students were effectively accessing relevant information.

The use of Wikipedia articles and a few other non-scholarly websites for supporting information indicates that some students could have further developed their abilities to find and evaluate appropriate sources. In another instance of ineffective evaluation of a source, one undergraduate student referred to Susan Stewart's critical work *On Longing* as a novel. The occurrences of sloppy and missing citations raise an additional concern. Comparing the results of the content analysis against the Information Literacy Standards reveals that students could benefit from training in the location and evaluation of sources as well as the legal and ethical use of information.

While such errors are consistent with the types of mistakes that many undergraduates make, the fact that they persist in final drafts of honors theses suggest that the art faculty may not be concerned with this aspect of the students' education. This offers some support for Pacey's (1982) observation that the library is not essential for art students in that some professors do not seem to mind or hold them accountable if they find information elsewhere (e.g. Wikipedia). It is clear that we cannot necessarily sell information literacy skills to studio art students on the strength of proper citations being central to their grades. Rather, we must work to educate both students and faculty about why these skills are relevant to their endeavors. Within an academic culture, these skills could be especially important when artists are interacting with others beyond their department, for example in pursuit of funding. In the theses, the students themselves

articulate the value of developing an understanding of their field and learning about other artists' work; the ability to find reliable information supports this learning. The NASAD accreditation standards also specify that students should learn to "understand and evaluate work in a variety of disciplines" (NASAD, 2009, p. 80).

In academic libraries, we tend to pitch our services to undergraduates in the context of a writing assignment, and the teachable moment most often presents itself when a student is in crisis over an assignment. However, the approach of "your professor wants you to have articles and books in your bibliography" is a simplification of our services as well as a simplification of the research process. The fact that art students' research is not rooted in a written assignment provides a challenge for information literacy instruction, but also, perhaps, an opportunity for a more holistic approach to this skill set. The teachable moment is trickier, but also full of potential if we can successfully introduce them to the tools and provide them with the skills to learn more about something they care about.

Reading the studio art theses, I found parallels between their artistic practice and library research. Library research is also a creative inquiry. While many undergraduates approach research in the humanities in a linear fashion, it is in fact dynamic and reflexive. These qualities are also found in Sullivan's (2010) explanation of art methodologies (p. 192).

One challenge in reaching out to studio art students is simply recognizing that this outreach will likely differ in form from outreach to other disciplines, and imagining what alternatives might be effective. The information studio art students may want is less predictable. We cannot create a subject guide for Art Projects; it is impossible to

highlight two or three sources that will be the most relevant. However, this also presents an opportunity: there is the potential to share the broader wealth of information that the library offers rather than a narrow sliver that will serve the needs of one subject. Given the variety of information sources used by studio art students, these students would benefit from a general introduction to the library; this would, of course, compound the perennial challenge of library instruction: the problem of presenting a great deal of information in a limited time slot. One potential approach would be a highlights tour of particularly engaging materials, for example special collections, image collections (including but not limited to fine art images), and examples of the variety of materials in the library's holdings. In developing specific skills, the practice of peer critique, and examining strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, within a library-research based assignment could help these students think more critically about the ways in which they find and use information in their art projects. Other possibilities for relating information literacy skills to students' course material and interests could include exploring examples of prominent artists who integrate research into their work in interesting and successful ways, and presenting information about the proper citation of sources within the context of a broader conversation about copyright issues regarding images and appropriation in creative works.

In a university setting such as UNC, where studio art students are earning a liberal arts degree, these students' library needs extend beyond the studio into different types of coursework. Bennett (2006) observes that BFA and MFA students enrolled in traditional academic courses tended "to feel a little more intimidated by the library or by the prospect of asking for research help" (p. 38). She elaborates: "These students are

certainly capable of performing at the same level as their peers, but they enter into these classes grounded in an entirely different educational experience" (p. 38). This suggests that studio art students are in particular need of library instruction and that a better grasp of art students' educational experience might help us in translating academic research into studio research terms. One thing that emerges from the thesis statements is that students are engaging with topics that are important to them on a personal level; this alone is different from many undergraduate academic pursuits. It presents an opportunity to introduce the library in the context of something vital in their lives rather than in the constructed context of a college paper.

Since art students are taking classes in other disciplines that require a certain level of library research, we may want to assume that they can learn about library resources and research skills in the context of, for example, a history assignment. However, Griseles' (2009) comment that she was introduced during her MFA experience "to academic literature of which I was previously unaware" illustrates that students may not discover art-specific library resources unless we introduce the library in connection to their art education (p. 8). Additionally, library instruction in other disciplines may fail to address scenarios unique to studio art projects. Recently, a student approached the Sloane Art Library's reference desk looking for information about artists that have photographed personally significant places. A few searches in UNC's online catalog were sufficient to demonstrate that our system of cataloging is not conducive to retrieving this type of information. In addition to understanding art students' classroom experiences and working processes, it is useful for us to learn where frustrations might arise when these students turn to library resources for certain information needs.

Conclusion

This study attempts to bring a new perspective to the literature on the information needs of studio art students by exploring sources used in studio art thesis projects. A content analysis of recent studio art thesis statements from UNC demonstrates that these students use scholarly print materials as well as a variety of other information sources. It shows that the students are engaged in serious inquiry in their creative projects. Hopefully, future work in different institutions will determine the transferability of my findings, which may be limited by the size and nature of my sample.

Further studies about studio art students' research processes are needed to clarify how library research fits into their projects. Interviews with students about how they discover and access sources of information would further our understanding of the role of the library in their projects. Additionally, it could be fruitful to conduct an assessment over time about studio art students' use of the library while engaging in outreach efforts to this population.

The need for work in this area is highlighted by Zanin-Yost and Tapley's (2008) observation that "art students tend not to find the process of learning and creating art compatible with library research because the majority have not learned how, or been encouraged, to meld the two" (p. 40). This points to the challenge of first drawing connections between creative inquiry and library research, conveying these connections to students, and introducing instruction addressing research skills into the studio art curriculum. My study attempts to address the first step. In order for the library to effectively serve an art curriculum, it must be introduced within the context of this

curriculum.

Appendix: Coding Scheme

Title:
Author:
Year:
Undergrad or Graduate work?
Media used:

Types of sources:
Scholarly print material
Non-scholarly print material (e.g. fiction, trade publications, children's literature, poetry)
Multimedia (e.g. film, music, a work of art, non-art images)
Personal experience
Person (e.g. interview, conversation)
Online (excluding article databases)

Topics:

Statements about methods or process:

Statements about research or inspiration:

Notes on bibliography and citations:

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