

Art Undefined

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Abstract

The purpose of my research project is to determine whether or not the Contemporary Art Movement has affected teaching in The College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois at Urban Champaign. My paper will focus primarily upon the effect that the style of teaching has upon the students and if the methods used contribute to the stereotyping of art students on campus. The stereotyping in consideration is one of a student who has few social or moral boundaries and who is not very well educated. As an art student at UIUC I have found that the current style of teaching has greatly changed. There is a much broader definition of art and what is considered "good" art.

I have also found that as a student, I am often viewed from a negative stereotype, which includes gender, race and educational background. I will be drawing much of my information from surveys that I will be giving out. I plan to interview several of the teachers in the College of Fine and Applied Arts as well as several art students, making sure all surveys are confidential and that the voluntary participation of the participants is protected. The surveys will allow me to find and pinpoint the change in teaching in the college as well as a view of art students on campus, through ethnic and personal stereotyping.

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Plan

I plan on researching the change that has occurred in the Art Department at The University of Illinois due to the contemporary art movement, and the social movements of the 60s. I will research how these movements have effected the style of teaching, the student work produced, the students in the department (both then and now), as well as the consequences that is has had on campus. As a current art student, I have noticed a difference in how classes are taught by older and younger teachers. I have also noticed a sense of unrest and caution amongst many topics in the department.

In many ways the definition of art has changed over the past 40 years that there is a gap growing between professors and students. Within that there are gaps within the professors and the students. I know for talking to people in the department during the 60s that it has greatly changed. There is a growing sense of caution used around people due to that fact that so much work is "interpolative" and there is a feeling that criticism is to offensive for the current generation.

I plan to interview art professors of varying ages in the department, as well as several grad students, and undergrad students ranging across all four years, as well as several graduates. I will also look up the work of artist both from The University of Illinois and from other schools, from the 1950's up until now in order to create a

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comparison. Beyond this I feel as though looking through newspapers; both University sponsored and individual on campus papers will help to relate the art to the current social status. Going into this I am very confident that I will find a large difference between the department's style of teaching in the past and that this difference has caused a great difference in the work being produced by students.

Introduction

The College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois has greatly changed in the past forty years. The question posed to current students is what has caused this change and what are the results of this change? The Contemporary art movement has caused changes to occur in the style of teaching, the interpretation of art and the perception of art students on campus. Teaching styles have changed to accommodate the fact that art has been reinterpreted. As a student in the college of Fine and Applied Arts I have found that this new view of art has transferred onto the student work being produced as well as the campus wide view of art students. The perception that all art students are eccentric, poorly educated, and find that the only thing worth calling art is a blob of paint has grown into a campus wide stereotype, one which as an art student I frequently encounter. This stereotype has grown largely on campus due to

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the changes that have taken place in the College of Fine and Applied Arts following the beginning of the Contemporary Art Movement.

Body

As a current art student, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I entered this research project with several ideas about what I might find. One of the most important things as I got further and further into the project became not so much proving or disproving my assumptions, but instead I began to wonder what could be done to change things. My assumptions going into the project were many, and I began with a very broad subject. I decided to look into other projects to find a good jumping off point. However, once I began researching on line in IDEALS as well as in academic journals, there was not a lot of information to go on. Most research projects done in the past had been on a grade school or high school level. They focused on funding issues in Chicago public schools, the lack of teachers available for growing art programs, and the issues faced by school administrations to place other academics at a higher standing than the art program. There was not much of anything concerning a university level art program concerning teaching methods, funding, student work or even issues of gender or race. This left me back were I had begun working with my assumptions as the foundation of my research questions.

The Contemporary Art Movement encompasses all artwork produced in the last twenty years. It is in this time frame that the very definition of art changed, branching

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out away from a long-standing definition in place from Classical Greece. The classical definition of art as found in the Webster's Online Dictionary is; "the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects."(Art 1) This definition implies that a person, who had previous knowledge of a particular skill set and who was creating the work to conform to a certain aesthetic, produced the work of art. It is this definition that has been changed due to the Contemporary Art Movement.

I have found that as an art student the dictionary definition is no longer used in the teaching methods at UIUC. Instead the definition of art changes from teacher to teacher, creating confusion among not only the students, but also people who encounter the students. People outside the art program are met with conflicting opinions from the work produced on campus, the mainstream media, as well as art students whom they encounter. There are two sides to look at this problem. There is a positive side that allows students to find self-interpretation and eliminate restriction. This seems to be the reasoning behind the multiple definitions. Some of the multiple definitions presented in a lecture by Grad Student Jennifer Furlong for the class Art History 112 in CFFA at UIUC include;¹ the traditionalist definition; "Art must be mimetic, i.e. it must have biological or physical attributes of what is presenting (and be representational or a reflection of the outside world)." (Furlong) There is the Brancusi definition; "Art Must be essentially true —it is about communicating the "essence of things" or ideas." (Furlong) and there is the definition brought about by Duchamp that "Works of art should not be unique. Art as object. The work of art (Readymade) is chosen and named by the artist". (Furlong) All of

¹ Unless noted otherwise, see art definitions are from ____ Furlong (12 April, 2010).

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these are definitions that are used by both students and teachers in the College of Art and Design. It is left to the student to decide what definition they want to agree with or if they agree with any definition at all, in other words self-definition of art. A new phenomenon that has appeared on campus is that stereotypes fall under the category of a students' major. If a student is in a particular major they are automatically given a particular stereotype. This is the main reason why defining art is so important to art students. If they have a solid definition then art students are better able to present themselves and create a positive reputation on campus.

Along with self-definition comes a lack of clarity. When I, as well as other art students, encounter other students campus, a large majority of artists are met with a sense of disrespect. Other students look at art students and perceive a jumble of definitions that all lead to one thing, that art has no definition. There for many people believe that art students will call anything art in order to justify their work, and this is the true beginning of the negative stereotyping of art students on campus. Eighty percent of art students on campus who I surveyed said that they encountered a negative stereotype. These stereotypes included a view of art students that was unintelligent, cheap, dug heads, non-driven individuals who have an easy major. Ten percent of students said that these stereotypes were ethnically based in that the students encountered racism in the classroom or outside of the classroom in regards to their status as an art student and a minority or international student. While the other ten percent did not pay any attention to stereotypes.²

² See survey questions

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The next step for me became to prove that teaching methods and the lack of a clear definition of art produced by the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has created a negative stereotype of art students on campus. Eighty percent of art students surveyed responded that the teachers all expected different things, thus causing confusion concerning the definition of art. Ten percent said that the small class sizes made the teachers more influential in their personalities as students, especial in their definitions of art. While another ten percent said that they stopped listening to teacher to avoid further confusion and just form their own opinions. I then surveyed all of the students had different definitions of art. The over all result of the survey was that art was not definable and that anything could be art there for they did not know how to actually form a definition. This confirmed that students were stuck trying to find their own way.

The disjointed answers received from the students in the College of Fine and Applied Arts at UIUC proves that the foundation for confusion starts in the style of teaching and not in the individual students. Upon going into this project I had planed on interviewing a number of the teachers in The College of Art and Design at the UIUC. However due to a short schedule as well as the NASAD review many of the teachers were unavailable, I was unable to get any information concerning the teachers' views on the subject. This meant that I was left with only the student point of view. So I decide to further press a question that had arisen from my assumptions.

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I wondered if there was anything that the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign could do to prevent the growth of negative stereotypes towards art students. One hundred percent of art students surveyed said that there was nothing that the University could do, and that it was not the administration's problem to deal with. Fifty percent of the students said that they were better off ignoring the negativity and the other fifty percent said that the University had enough problems with budget and alike to deal with students. Students would rather obtain the education, facilities, and degree that they are paying for then have the administration try and relate to students on an individual bases.

Looking at all of the data collected I found that my own assumptions going into the project were confirmed. Art students at The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign are widely affiliated with a negative stereotype that in some cases may include ethnicity; some ethnicity issues raised included bias from teachers. I found that there is no set definition of art provided by the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and that this is a major source of confusion amongst students. I also found that many students have a lack of confidence in the administration and what can be done for the students. All of my surveys led me to further questioning on the subject.

Since many of the students were not confident in the administration's ability to do anything to help, just what can be done to build student confidence in the

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administration? Can the College of Fine and Applied Arts make changes in the curriculum that will give some clarity to the students as well as the rest of the University? Perhaps the problem is not one that can be fixed by teaching standards alone. Maybe it is a problem that is based on the art world and must first be addressed by society and then addressed within the College. I also would have liked to get the viewpoint of teachers in The College of Fine and Applied Arts. Interviewing the teachers would be an excellent opportunity for further research. I think that getting another viewpoint would help to further clarify the cause for the particular teaching style in place, one approach may be to set up parameters for teaching methods, while another may be to address the issue of multiple definition in class in order to prepare the art students. It may have also shed some light on the question of solving the problem. Over the course of this project I have discovered new avenues of study: teaching method conflict, administrative issues, as well as art students and non-art student interaction and the conflicts that arise from it. There is little previous research in the subject and there for there is a lot of room for new projects.

Survey Questions For Students

1. Do you feel that the definition of art has changed over the past 40 years based on

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your own experience or on your art history knowledge?

Yes

No

Please Explain.

2. In terms of how art is defined, how would you define the teaching methods in The College of Fine and Applied Arts at The University of Illinois?

Please Explain.

3. How has the student work being produced at The University of Illinois changed in the past 20 years?

Please Explain

4. As an art student at The University of Illinois do you encounter stereotypes specific to you as an art student, or as a student who encounters art students?

Do these stereotypes include race or gender?

Yes Yes they include race or gender; please state race and gender

No No they do not include race or gender

Please Explain.

5. If yes to the above question, how do these stereotypes make you feel as a student and as an individual? How do you think the university could solve these problems?

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Please Explain.

6. *As an art student do you feel that it is the style of teaching that has strongly affected the work that you are producing, or your own driving agenda?*

Yes

No, self-driven assignments

Please Explain.

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Lecture.