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### THE GALLERY AS A SITE OF CONVERGENCE: THE ROLE OF CREATIVE ENVIRONMENTS AT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

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The University of San Francisco

THE GALLERY AS A SITE OF CONVERGENCE:  
THE ROLE OF CREATIVE ENVIRONMENTS AT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education of the  
University of San Francisco

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
In  
Organization and Leadership


By  
Jordán Francisco Sandoval

Spring 2022

This thesis, written by  
Jordán Francisco Sandoval  
University of San Francisco  
May 18, 2022

under the guidance of the project committee,  
and approved by all its members,  
has been accepted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
In  
Organization and Leadership



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(Faculty Advisor)

19 May 2022

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(Date)

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I am an avid believer that we reflect the people and places we come across. During this masters program, I have been inspired by many peers and professors. However two individuals stand out. Professor Donahue, I am thankful to you for encouraging me to unapologetically express myself in my writing; whimsical and imaginative as it may be. Professor Chong, I am grateful for your patience and guidance; you helped elevate my writing in ways I didn't know were possible.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Not enough research explores the role of creative environments at postsecondary institutions. In response, this qualitative research study focuses upon university galleries believing them to be exemplary artistic spaces within college campuses. Using a theoretical framework of place-consciousness, the researcher examined the functions of the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery at the University of San Francisco (USF), paying close attention to the ways it engaged the academic community in terms of scholarship and instruction. Informed by grounded theory and phenomenology, this study interviewed five professors who integrated a gallery visit into their curriculum during the 2021-2022 academic year. Collecting these first-hand perspectives and experiences, the study arrived at a collective understanding of the gallery's role at USF concerning its pedagogical, aesthetic, spatial and social dimensions.



**CHAPTER ONE:  
INTRODUCTION**



## STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

This project is shaped by my passion for the arts alongside my experience as a first-generation student. Coming into this masters program with a degree in Art History and Art Management, this project reflects my appreciation of cultural institutions. Spending countless hours in galleries and museums, I became enthralled with these environments of life-long learning at a young age. It wasn't until my undergraduate where I came to realize that I could pursue an educational career in the arts. Taking a leap of faith, I switched gears, changing my degree from what was initially the sciences to the arts. However, I quickly found myself faced with confusion by classmates, friends, and family. Instead of encouraging my interests, I was stopped in my tracks and told to "think practically". Discouraging as those remarks were, I've come to understand that these responses are informed by the financial insecurities the arts historically face in contrast to the desire to socioeconomic mobilize coming from an immigrant household. Instead of pivoting away from the creative field, I have deepened my commitment to the arts, firmly believing in their value. For, it is my belief that the arts are not only aesthetic but transformational, teaching us—at an institutional, community and individual level—creative ways to reimagine our world(s). As congresswoman Barbara Jordan remarked, "The arts are not a frill. The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature, and help to shape our identity....Art has the potential to unify. It can speak in many languages without a translator. The arts do not discriminate. The arts lift us up." (Jordan, 1993). Configuring my developing interests in the arts and emerging scholarly experience, I have engaged in a research study that underscores a feeling I have quietly sensed my whole life: the power and promise of creative experiences.



## **PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT**

This project examined the interactions between the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery and the academic community at the University of San Francisco (USF). Interviewing professors at USF who involved their courses with the gallery during the 2020-2021 academic school year, this work arrived at a grounded theory that begins to articulate the ways the art gallery may contribute to classroom instruction. In order to arrive at these findings, this study examined the first-hand experiences of professors' encounters with the fall exhibition *All That You Touch: Art & Ecology* in addition to other instances they engaged with the gallery during their time at USF. Collecting insights in this manner, the findings of this study call attention to the role of university art galleries; namely, in terms of course instruction and community engagement.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Today, students are faced with intersectional issues encompassing racial reckoning, sustainability, democracy, neoliberalism and much more (Boix Mansilla, 2008; Burnard et al., 2018; Cuff & Boom, 2016; Santos, 2007; Williams, 2016). Identifying solutions to these problems and raising awareness of their realities, requires educational institutions to foster interdependent ways-of-thinking that can deepen classroom instruction (Barrett, 2019; Budwig & Alexander, 2020; MacColl, 2019; McGregor & Volckmann, 2013; Nicolescu, 2012; Steger, 2019). In light of a growing need for fresh perspectives and complex thinking that draws on understanding across and between disciplines, this paper looks towards university galleries as creative spaces of inquiry (Darso, 2017; Lachapelle et al., 2003; Lee & Northcott, 2021). Whether harnessing the arts to invite scholars from diverse subject areas to think about concepts in a new light (Donahue & Stuart, 2014), or assuming a cocurricular location on campus to offer aesthetic experiences that serve student's development (Astin 1984; Payton, White, & Mullins,

2020), galleries can act as sites of contemplation which are not often found in other spaces. This considered, galleries offer academics compelling experiences that not only serve to deepen knowledge of particular subjects but that also shed light on realities that reach across multiple disciplines (Erbitz, 2007; Illeris, 2015; Mayer, 2003; Saratsi et al., 2019). Recognizing these capacities, this paper explored current ways in which arts-based spaces at postsecondary institutions can be a resource to academics (Burnard et al., 2018). For, as research stands now, the arts remain a site of contention in an uncertain working world (Hetland & Winner, 2001) and the existing dynamics between cocurricular arts spaces and formal instruction in higher-education are not often examined. However, it may be that when academic disciplines integrate the arts, new dynamics can arise spurring curiosity and creativity in students' learning. All things that can equip students to become critical thinkers and doers in a globalized world (Chickering, 2010).

Drawing upon research in student affairs, universities are multifaceted environments that vocationally develop students as they advance into the workforce while also encouraging their exploration of their identity and positionality (Patton, 2016). Plenty of theorists acknowledge higher education institutions as environments that holistically attend to students' growth; these being in relation to student's ethics (Perry, 1970), cognitive (Magolda, 2004) and interpersonal development (Chickering & Reisser, 1969), among others. Although literature in student affairs advances an expansive philosophy of college education which centers the student's experience, research does not often interrogate how these concepts resonate with university professors. To explore these concepts, I interviewed professors who integrated a visit to the Thatcher Gallery into their curriculum. In doing so, the research arrived at a more nuanced understanding of the ways university art galleries engage the academic community. From these conclusions, this thesis

showcases existing relationships between art galleries and educators at the university level while also building on emerging trends in higher-education; particularly, the need for interdisciplinarity and the ways cocurricular arts spaces exemplify these philosophies.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

University galleries are compelling spaces of inquiry that interact with a wide academic audience in addition to visitors beyond the academic community (Erbitz, 2007; Shari, McKinney & Straugh, 2007). In contrast to general conceptions of galleries as private spaces outside educational environments, galleries stationed within post secondary institutions are unique environments that may underscore the ideals of holistic learning and the aesthetic development of students (Fr. Lucas, 2021; Möersch & Sharp, 2003). Welcoming creativity and curiosity, arts-driven spaces such as galleries naturally pay respect to multiple ways-of-knowing all while nurturing new ways of thinking through aesthetically engaging experiences (Davis et al., 2011; Kezar, 2001; Sharifan & Moore, 2020). Despite such qualities, there is not much research that examines the role of galleries stationed within post secondary institutions. In response, this project examined the role such creative spaces play on college campuses. Particularly, seeking to understand how cocurricular<sup>1</sup> spaces such as galleries may contribute to scholarship in higher education (Rose & Betsy, 2004). In certain cases, environments outside classrooms or typical sites of instruction, offer students opportunities for social cohesion which not only influence their academic performance but have the potential to promote intercultural dialog; factors, which are important for the satisfaction of underrepresented populations at higher education institutions (Sharifan & Moore, 2020). In other cases, examining the relationship between co-curricular strategies and the apprehension of subject material, academics how the adoption of such

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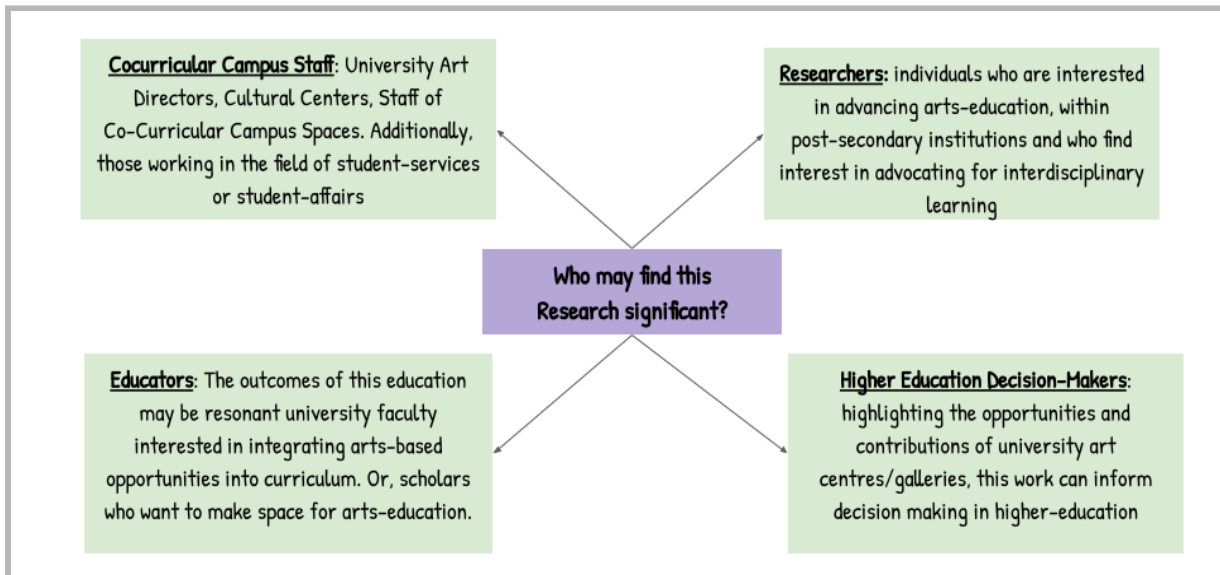
<sup>1</sup> The term cocurricular is generally understood as activities, programs or learning experiences that take place outside students' normal course of study.

approaches exposes students to experiential learning which bolster student’s confidence in their chosen course of study (Cartile et al., 2020).

Valuing the arts-based nature of university galleries, this work focused on Thacher Gallery as a site that offers aesthetically engaging experiences that may deepen student learning. As demonstrated by the map below, multiple audiences may find this work significant. It is significant for directors of university art centers who want to encourage students' creative thinking across multiple disciplines. It may be inspiring for educators seeking novel approaches to make curriculum within their discipline more engaging. It is also significant for higher-education decision makers to encourage their support of cocurricular campus spaces. Lastly, it may resonate with researchers interested in the arts at higher-education institutions.

**Figure 1:**

*Resonance Map*



*Note.* a visual map that details the four main audiences that would find this research significant.

## BACKGROUND & NEED

Thacher Gallery annually presents a diverse series of art exhibitions that probe aesthetics intended to stimulate dialogue that reinforce the Jesuit university's commitment to inquiry and social justice. Nestled within the larger academic institution, Thacher is a creative place that has the opportunity to contribute towards scholarship outside of students' classroom instruction. Operating as a cocurricular space, the gallery holds a unique position on college campus where it stands at a crossroads of multiple disciplines, while not being tied to any particular field of study. As a result of these *non-disciplinary* qualities, the gallery has the opportunity to interact with the USF academic community through aesthetic projects that involve multiple areas of study. Given this flexibility, this thesis sought to highlight the ways in which the gallery may support student learning and engage the academic community at the University of San Francisco. Recognizing a series of partnerships that formed between university professors and the gallery during the 2021-2022 academic year, this project aimed to uncover two things. Primarily, it hoped to highlight the ways in which Thacher Gallery collaborated with academics as a classroom partner. Secondly, the project also aimed to highlight the perceptions the USF community have towards the gallery altogether. By answering these two questions, this thesis hoped to identify the particular qualities which make the gallery compelling to academics at USF, while also raising awareness of interactions the gallery has with the academic community.

Recognizing the ways in which university art galleries usher in creativity and operate as spaces of learning, research acknowledges the educational applications of arts-based practices and the spaces that welcome them (Beyerbach & Ramalho, 2011; Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005; Dewdney, 2008; Erbitz, 2007; Lachapelle et al., 2003; Pringle 2009; Webster & Wolfe, 2013). Operationalizing the arts, galleries are exemplary spaces that engender 'tacit knowledge' by

effectively integrating experiential learning and constructivist principles of learning (Chemi, 2016; Darso, 2017; Morsch, 2011; Sternfield, 2013). Considering the close connection galleries have with arts education and acknowledging the learning that may transpire in such settings, Sternfiend (2013) remarks “gallery education could be conceived as an assembly in a public space where different actors and forms of knowledge come together” (p.5).

Taking these thoughts among researchers into account, galleries can be considered educational environments beyond formal classroom spaces that buttress students’ learning by providing sensory experiences that can at once spark one’s emotion, imagination and critical thinking (Burnard et al., 2018). As outlined in the *Model of Aesthetic Learning* by Lachapelle et al. (2003) museums or galleries may function as aesthetic environments that stimulate the visual senses of audience members while also celebrating their tacit life experiences and idiosyncratic ways-of-thinking. Because of these dynamics, galleries may operate as multisensory learning environments that directly engage individuals as thought-partners of a collective understanding (Burnham & Kai-Kee 2005, 2011; Möersch & Sharp, 2003).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Examining the educational experiences that uniquely transpire at Thacher Gallery while also considering its role at the university from the perspective of academics, this project sought to answer the following questions:

1. As a cocurricular space, do University Galleries provide students with educational experiences that complement their classroom instruction? If so, in what ways?
2. According to university faculty, how does the Thacher Gallery interact with the academic community? To what degree does the gallery align with the educational mission of the university?

3. How are the creative/artistic elements of the gallery operationalized for educational outcomes? Do these dynamics differ from other campus spaces?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As research highlights, places that employ creative practices not only cultivate sensory experiences that aren't easily found in other places but also exercise educational principles (Miller 2018, 2019; Philips, 2010). Employing themes of constructivism, researchers note how the arts operate as collaborative environments in which administrators and participants are both recognized as knowledge bearers (Chemi, 2017; Xanthoudaki, 1998). In order to value the dynamics amidst galleries stationed in educational institutions, this thesis is particularly informed by place-conscious perspectives. Known either as critical pedagogy of place or place-based education, this socio-spatial framework critically recognizes sites of learning as spaces that are enmeshed in a social nexus of histories and communities (Fischer, 2020; Stevenson, 2008).

In terms of school environments, place-consciousness blurs the borders between formal and informal learning environments, which allow for contemplative practices to emerge in which students are seen as co-participants of inquiry, allowing for diverse viewpoints and experiences to be taken into account (Greenwood, 2011; Kelly & Sharon, 2019). As demonstrated in a case study by Herman (2017), immersing classes in environments outside formal learning settings resulted in students developing a more nuanced understanding of the interrelationships between their discrete academic subject area and broader sociocultural perspectives. As indicated in other studies, engaging place-based pedagogies in curriculums often provides classes with informative experiences that raise student's awareness of the interdependent social systems and an understanding of their positionality within them (Goralnik et al., 2012; Grunewald, 2003; Morgan, 2000; Smith, 2007; Stevenson, 2008;).

Affirming these sentiments, a study administered by Alagona & Simon's (2010) highlights how providing college students with interdisciplinary curricula are the types of courses that move beyond 'compartmentalized learning' in higher-education. Interviewing students before and after the completion of an environmental field course that combines natural sciences, the humanities and social sciences (known as the Highland Sierra Project at CSU Monterey Bay) researchers noted how an overwhelming majority found the course's fusion of quantitative and qualitative elements useful. It is this reasoning which demonstrates why this thesis engaged place-consciousness as its theoretical framework, as it allows one to recognize how environments outside typical site of instruction reinforce student's comprehension of the classes they're enrolled in, while also deepening the awareness of the places in which they are immersed within and beyond the sites of formal learning at the university.

In summary, straddling both formal and informal learning environments, place-conscious education acknowledges how social, political, historical realities inform curriculum even when these topics are not central to class content. In doing so, it raises awareness of students' positionality, underscores the lived experiences individuals hold outside the classroom, and reframes schools in larger cultural contexts. Conceptualizing spaces as multifaceted environments, this particular lens offers critical understanding as to how post-secondary institutions are enmeshed in a larger social fabric the spaces stationed within them ground us "an intellectual practice of creating a nexus between past, present and future" (Romero, 2021, p.6). Ultimately, this curricular approach to education recognizes the importance of holistic student development. More importantly, how engaging a variety of environments or at the very least acknowledging places as pedagogical tools can deepens students' learning. (Darron & Sharon, 2019; Goralnik et al, 2012; Grunewald, 2003; Smith, 2007).



## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Grounded Theory:** Proposed initially by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, grounded theory is a form of research which centers the perceptions of individuals. Integrating principles of phenomenology which equip personal and specific experiences to reinforce understandings of particular spaces or concepts, grounded theory stands apart as it uses data (i.e. qualitative interviews.) to arrive or formulate a new theory or concept altogether (Bluff, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Chun, Birks, & Francis, 2019).

**Gallery Education:** Believing that galleries hold educational applications and have the capacity to facilitate aesthetic learning experiences, the term refers to the pedagogy employed in art-galleries, museums, in addition to other informal and formal arts-based spaces. These include constructivist, collective, creative, reflective, experiential in addition to other forms of learning (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2005, 2011; Dewdney, 2008; Erbitz, 2007 Lachepelle et al, 2003; Philip, 2010; Pringle, 2009; Sternfield, 2013; Xanthoudaki, 1998).

**Critical Phenomenology:** Rooted in first-hand experiences of individuals from all walks of life, critical phenomenology is a research method used in the social sciences to identify key understandings of a particular occurrence. This method specifically celebrates the lived experiences of multiple people from a particular space, and uses these insights to describe common themes of larger occurrences. In doing so, this approach actively takes into account the dangers of over-generalizing experiences and holds researchers accountable to critically reflect about the role people have in describing key phenomena (Guenther, 2019; Salamon, 2018).

**Art Integration:** This term refers to the use of the arts processes and experiences as educational tools to foster learning in non-artistic disciplines and domains. (Lilliedahl, 2018; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006). Arts-integration, is also considered an interdisciplinary approach to teaching that recognizes the importance of infusing creativity in school-based learning. For, it not only provides students with meaningful ways to synthesize their understanding of subject-matter but also reinforce trending ideas of constructivism in education where students are able to be constructors of their learning and understanding (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021; Donahue & Stuart 2010; Marshall, 2014).

**Creative Placemaking:** Equipping arts and culture into urban development projects, creative placemaking is a framework that seeks to redesign physical spaces without diminishing the unique character within social communities. Because of its thought partnership across sectors, this framework is intersectional in nature as it harnesses the energies of artists, economists, environmentalists, politicians among other community and/or public service members to respond to social issues (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Schupbach & Jackson, 2019; Webb, 2014; Zitcer, 2020).

**Transdisciplinarity:** Sharing overlaps with interdisciplinary, transdisciplinarity views knowledge-production as not solely an academic pursuit but one that actively incorporates informal and formal ways of theorizing. In doing so, this form of thinking synthesizes multiple subject areas to not only arrive at new perspectives but to do away with distinctions altogether (MacColl et al., 2019; Budwig & Alexander, 2020; Steger, 2019; McGregor & Volckman, 2013; Morales, 2017; Nicolescu, 2012).

**Interdisciplinarity:** In the scope of education, this term refers to a convergence of traditional educational methods in order to arrive at novel approaches or solutions. It is the process of integrating disciplines that may traditionally be thought of as separate fields (Barry et al. 2008; Terrant & Thiele, 2016).

**Place-Consciousness and Place-Based Education:** This is a framework that sheds light on the ways in which physical places are informed by local histories, cultures, legacies, and communities. In other words, taking deeply into consideration the physical and social elements of learning besides theoretical concepts, this particular pedagogy reinforces the mastery of subject matter while also nurturing student's socio-cultural awareness (Miller 2018, 2019; Philips, 2010).



**CHAPTER TWO:  
REVIEW OF THE  
LITERATURE**



## OVERVIEW

University galleries are cocurricular spaces of inquiry which have the potential to support scholarship at postsecondary institutions. Underscoring these qualities, this literature review compiles research that: (I) recognizes the importance of educational practices that move beyond disciplinary teaching, (II) highlights the opportunities advanced across arts-based and gallery-led experiences and (III) considers how socio-spatial perspectives such as creative placemaking can frame learning in engaging ways. When these three research areas are taken into consideration, they provide us with an understanding of the significance of integrating multiple ways of knowing in education and how cocurricular spaces supporting the arts within college campuses may advance these principles.

Recognizing university galleries as sites of inquiry that operate outside conventional learning environments, the first research area examines educational practices that extend scholarship beyond the focus of a singular discipline. Two modes of instruction, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, are established pedagogies which promote an interconnected and convergent form of learning. Although both frameworks concern themselves with intelinking respectively distinct subject areas, their directions vary slightly (Barry et al., 2008). While interdisciplinarity connects different disciplines in hopes of deepening comprehension of certain concepts, transdisciplinarity harnesses multiple ways of thinking in hopes of moving beyond disciplinary boundaries altogether (Budwig & Alexander, 2020; Marshall, 2014; Tarrant & Thiele, 2016). As it relates to this thesis, these distinctions are important as they shed light on two things. First, they highlight the advantages of integrating diverse perspectives within learning experiences typically found in classroom instruction. Secondly, they stress the outcomes of widening curriculum; mainly, its ability to couple

real-world problems with core teaching goals. Operating both ways, university galleries may be understood as collaborative environments within higher-education that contribute to disciplinary scholarship while also raising awareness of larger social issues beyond learning institutions.

Exploring practices that view the arts as pedagogical devices, the second area of research illustrates the educational opportunities that arise in creative experiences (Saratsi et al, 2019; Sherman & Morrissey, 2017; Webster & Wolfe, 2013). Conceptualizing art as an entry-point for conversations, academics recognize art as a tool for engaging the lived experiences of students alongside their apprehension of course content (Donahue & Stuart, 2010). For instance, researchers underscore the ways in which the arts foster opportunities for critical thinking which can complement the learning students engage in subject-areas outside the arts (Smulyan, 2021). In other cases, academics note the arts capacity to reinforce course content with perspectives that shed light on larger socio-political realities (Desai, 2020; Alexander, 2003; Motola, 2016). Acknowledging the duplicity of the arts to exist within and beyond formal education spaces, academics situates the arts as social practices that serve to uplift communities (Woywod & Deal, 2016). When these qualities of reflexivity and diversity are taken into account, one can understand how creative practices not only engage students in their studies but also contribute to their development. Considering these perspectives, Thacher Gallery may be conceptualized as a dynamic space that facilitates aesthetic experiences in order to present perspectives that deepen student's worldview alongside reinforcing their understanding of course topics.

Reviewing literature that champions socio-spatial perspectives and examines its connections to educational frameworks, the third research area explores creative placemaking. Approaching physical environments as spaces informed by past and present histories, creative placemaking is considered a cultural policy strategy that pushes for the inclusion of the arts and

community in urban development (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Understanding the role arts and culture play in fortifying a community's sense-of-belonging, creative placemaking encourages organizations and institutions to engage in arts-based practices to maintain trust with affinity groups as urban spaces evolve. Despite its deep connections to metropolitan and municipal projects (Zitcer, 2020), this viewpoint offers a compelling way of thinking about the spaces we come across or where we reside (Webb, 2014). Conceptualizing physical locations as multifaceted environments undergirded by community, politics and history (Taylor, 2020), this lens offers a particular understanding as to how educational institutions and the spaces stationed within them can ground us in “an intellectual practice of creating a nexus between past, present and future” (Romero, 2021, p.6). As it relates to this project, creative placemaking helps one conceptualize the ‘social situatedness’<sup>2</sup> of Thacher Gallery given its physical location on campus. An understanding which sheds light on the potential dynamics (‘symbolic interactionism’<sup>3</sup>) that may exist between this particular cocurricular space and the academic community at USF. Specifically, the ways in which Thacher Gallery may reinforce USF’s broader educational mission of socially-minded scholarship while also operating as an intersectional learning environment that deepens students' understanding in their respective disciplines.

### **Fusing Disciplines: The Significance of Inter/transdisciplinarity**

Acknowledging the diversifying demographics in higher-education, there is an observed need for institutions and educators to complexify academic practices with curricula that reflects heterogenous student populations (Romero, 2021; Sharifan & Moore, 2020). As detailed in a university report on race and ethnicity trends, the enrollment of underserved populations in

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<sup>2</sup> As explained by *Costello M. (2014)*, situatedness is a concept that recognizes the impact physical places have on our understanding of the world around us.

<sup>3</sup> As postulated by *Del Casino Jr. (2020)*, symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory which recognizes how human relationships and interactions can inform general understandings of social environments.

college has increased across multiple ethnicities based on data pulled from the U.S. Census Bureau Population Survey. This trend was most notable in a 10.3% increase in the hispanic undergraduate population from 1996 and 2016; secondly, this trend was present in the Black undergraduate population increasing 2.9% (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor & Chessman, 2019). In regards to interdisciplinarity, research shows that converging disciplines not only enriches student's formal education but also complements the aims of learning institutions; this considered, there is cited importance of establishing diverse learning experiences in postsecondary scholarship (Budwig & Alexander 2020; Davis, Christodoulou, & Gardner, 2011; Mansilla, 2008; Kezar, 2001). Additionally, as academic literature underscores, the university can be considered a multiplex learning environment that celebrates established subject areas while also acknowledging the personal perspectives and philosophies of scholars (Budwig & Alexander, 2020; Dear & Casardi, 2016) Recognizing these perspectives, engaging interdisciplinarity in postsecondary institutions can foster educational practices that align with demographic trends of a diversifying pool of students.

Exploring the integration of disciplines in education, research addresses the importance of providing pluralistic educational experiences. Scholars recognize how making conscious efforts to diversify curriculum, whether by welcoming novel perspectives or facilitating creative opportunities to process information, serve to deepen the learning students experience in relation to core teaching content (Davis, Christodoulou, Seider, & Gardner, 2011; Kezar, 2001; Rose & Betsy, 2004). Beyond its contributions towards student development, research also highlights the themes of equity and inclusion which emerge in educational practices which center more than one discipline (Santos, 2007; Steger, 2019). These findings are significant, as they highlight how weaving multiple subjects together can cultivate compelling perspectives that can respond to



intersectional issues transpiring in the world beyond the classroom (Santos, 2009; Budwig & Alexander, 2020). Accordingly, spaces which nurture convergent thinking in this manner are critical assets to the mission of scholarship and inquiry learning institutions stand behind (Mcgregor & Volvkmann, 2013; Morales, 2017; Jacob, 2014).

Demonstrating how interdisciplinary practices complements learning in higher education, researchers explore cases in which the merging of different disciplines led to compelling projects. Equipping creative practice to deepen scientific concepts, Risney, Naylor & Marshall (2019) examined an instance where artists and geologists collaborated to visually communicate scientific findings to the public through the format of an exhibition. Similarly, MacColl (2019) highlighted an instance where a series of arts-based exhibitions became a medium in which environmental scientists facilitated thoughtful dialog with community members and policy-makers. In other cases, academics examined how intermixing cocurricular environments alongside formal classroom instruction can serve to reinforce student's sense-of-belonging on campus by forging colloquial opportunities that encouraged students to concurrently embrace their own perspectives and those of their peers (Cartile et al, 2019; Sharifan & Moore, 2020). Whether bridging respectively discrete subject areas or providing opportunities that integrate social experiences into formal instruction, expanding scholarship beyond one discipline not only enhances student's learning but anchors education in themes of humanity, community, and life experience (Burnard et al, 2018; Marshall, 2014). Considering the role of interdisciplinarity in harnessing diverse ways-of-knowing (Morales, 2017; Steger, 2019) one can understand how cocurricular places may foster social practices through their integration of numerous disciplines.

Advocating for pedagogical practices that celebrate the cognitive diversity of students, scholars look towards transdisciplinarity as it operationalizes learning in a way that recognizes

the multiple ways people arrive at knowledge (Nicolescu, 2012). Acknowledging these considerations in the field of higher education, research has interrogated contemporary university models. Highlighting the compartmentalization of learning that occurs within colleges, researchers have suggested the utilization of learning models which frame knowledge production as a collaborative rather than isolated process (McGregor & Volckman, 2013). For instance, surveying a wide pool of university research offices, Tarrant and Thiele (2016) identified common trends in relation to how post-secondary institutions approached concepts of interdisciplinarity. In doing so, they identified how often times schools and scholars were not as welcoming of alternative learning models. In response they advocated for, “an increase in disciplinary convergence across isolated fields of study as a method to productively and meaningfully address a world characterized by increasing interdependencies” (p.356). Echoing these sentiments, research demonstrates how integrating cocurricular arts practices in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics results in cross-disciplinary experiences that deepen student’s learning and development (Payton et al, 2020). Although scholars encourage experiential learning models, literature reflects a gap between theory and praxis as higher education often falls short of integrating established cocurricular activities and non-traditional learning experiences in students' formal curriculum (Cartile, Marsden & Liscouët-Hanke, 2019). In response to these gaps, this study highlights a series of examples where professors successfully involved a cocurricular space to serve their educational goals and support their students' classroom experience.

Acknowledging interdisciplinarity, researchers also support transdisciplinary practices given its capacity to bridge prescribed ways-of-knowing in established subject areas with subjective experiences that reside beyond typical academic contexts or concerns. As Morales

(2017) comments, “The call for transdisciplinary research practices is a result of recognizing the interwoven processes and impacts of the major problems facing our world today” (p.30).

Looking at equitable learning practices as a form of equity, Santos (2007) interprets the expanding of traditional worldviews to actively involve and include alternative ways-of-knowing, as methods that strengthen teaching and learning practices. Taking Santos' perspective into account, interdisciplinary thinking can serve social justice aims as it prompts individuals to identify multiple forms of knowledge, see the power dynamics between dominant and non-dominant epistemes, and thread classroom learning to real world problems. In agreement, Barret (2019) advocates for a recognition of *transrational* knowledge in policy and pedagogy, a framework that is pluralistic and welcoming of a wide range of learning models. Closely related, research also examines how interdisciplinary actions can particularly complement fields such as the sciences that respectively favor objective knowledge over subjective experiences (Steelman et al, 2019). In response to these viewpoints, this research examines instances in the academy where galleries facilitate subjective experiences to enhance the technical knowledge students are in the process of developing within their regular classes.

### **Operationalizing Space: Creative Placemaking in Education**

Echoing concepts found in interdisciplinarity and place-conscious pedagogy, research surrounding creative placemaking explores the ways in which socio-spatial perspectives may inform educational practices (Miller, 2018). Similar to place-based education's acknowledgment of the intersections underlying learning environments, creative placemaking recognizes the complex dynamics that inform living and learning spaces (Zitcer, 2020). Instead of shying away from complexity, creative placemaking acknowledges the many tacit and stated ways of knowing that coexist to truly understand and possibly redesign physical environments (Taylor, 2020). It is

from this awareness that this framework partners with artists, advocates and community members alongside what may be seen as strictly practical city projects. Although many examples cite this framework in terms of urban projects, these principles can and have been applied within the educational sphere (Elmgren, 2015). In higher-education these frameworks highlight the porous nature of post secondary learning environments as they can sustain relationships with communities beyond campus and exemplify practices that embrace an collective ownership of intellectual work. As Grunewald (2003) suggests, place-consciousness pays attention to the “the perceptual, cultural, ecological, and political dimensions of places” (p. 646). Applying these perspectives to learning settings, one can reframe schools as larger cultural contexts that implicitly invite the lived experiences individuals—educators and students—hold outside the classroom. Building on these frameworks, this thesis shows how informal educational environments may hold ties to the social ecology of learning institutions and play a role in the scholarship that occurs in the academic community (Grunewald, 2003; Santos, 2003).

Recognizing artists as effective communicators that can visualize the nuanced relationships affinity groups hold to physical environments, creative placemaking heralds the arts as equitable strategies that may capture the identity of communities in the sphere of urban development (Cuff & Wolch, 2016; Schupbach & Jackson, 2019; Smulyan, 2021). As Clarke (2020) explains, public projects which employ the arts tend to be human-centered as, “they provide people agency over their environments and [build] equity into the systems which govern [their] lives” (p.19). Echoing these themes of empowerment and collectivity informing creative placemaking, Markusen & Gadwa (2010) vocalizes the ties between the arts and community by explaining how creative projects render visible “the connection between particular places and the people rising in them” (p.23). Affirming the artistic qualities innate in Creative Placemaking,

Webb (2014), engages in three case studies to conclude that the use of the arts, “[provides] opportunities for citizens to express their relationship with their social and physical environment”, and articulating the aesthetics of belonging for all residents” (p.46). Highlighting the inclusivity of these practices, Zabel (2016) frames artists as knowledge-bearers who are cognizant of the culture in their community and can use their efforts to creatively express these understandings; as they comment, “Artists...celebrate the unique and important strengths of a community that are already in place” (p.8).

A second body of research within this domain suggests outcomes such as community development, social well-being, civic engagement of community members, and intercommunication across sectors when leaning into creative placemaking (Kresge, 2013; Schupbach & Jackson, 2019). Viewing the practice through an organizational perspective, McCormick et al (2020) defines creative placemaking as a critical strategy for deepening the social resonance in development projects, given its unique focus on social, emotional, artistic and cultural, environmental, financial, and economic impacts” (p.5). Likewise framing the process of creative placemaking, Vasquez (2012) verbalizes the unique collaborative and community-centered qualities of such frameworks and how they can be geared towards the revitalization, reamination, and reinvigoration of spaces. Outlining the hallmarks of the framework, Vasquez (2012) defines creative placemaking as, “ a diverse array of strategies and processes designed to improve quality of life in a community through and with the arts. It combines the goals and methods of community development, cultural development and economic development with a place-based and asset-based orientation” (p. 4). Echoing these perspectives, Schupbach & Jackson (2019) acknowledge the invaluable role the arts play in preserving culture, pointing out how individuals committed to the field (i.e. artists and designers)

may communicate the tacit knowledge and nuances of communities in unique ways. Examining creative placemaking beyond redevelopment projects, Schupbach & Jackson (2019) highlight the ways in which the arts can be operationalized for public service and by extension the common good in addition to celebrating creativity in our society.

While creative placemaking integrates the arts to revitalize communities, place-based frameworks offer educators a critical approach towards knowledge-production, recognizing the role actively social, historical, and cultural contexts play in learning (Morgan, 2000) Equipping creative placemaking and place-conscious principles, researchers have begun to question academic practices, reimagining how learning institutions are and can be immersed in local issues or realities beyond the campus (Cuff & Wolch, 2016). Interrogating the role of the academy, Cuff & Wolch (2016) explored the interactions between the residential Los Angeles community and UCLA to raise awareness of the present interdisciplinary practices. Importantly, they offered examples that affirm the ways in which creative placemaking can expand traditional scholarship to involve discourses that arise in multiple settings and environments. Although this research offered compelling evidence as to how urban spaces can become educational tools that capture new ways of understanding and imaging, this thesis tries to examine ways in which cocurricular places within the academy advance these similar outcomes by paying close attention to how such spaces present the academy with aesthetically interdisciplinary programs which explore the role of colleges and universities on broader issues.

Exploring the outcomes of creative placemaking and place-based education, a last body of research examines the integration of these principles in contemporary school settings and their impacts. Examining the ways in which creative placemaking can present significant contributions to higher education, researchers underscore the ways in which such principles can

expand student's understanding of their positionality within school and social contexts. As Marissa (2020) remarks, "creative placemaking pedagogy creates opportunities for students to examine their own material positioning in the university and in the communities in which they dwell" (p.24). Similarly recognizing the ways in which the use of these frameworks uphold progressive educational philosophies, research recognizes how including diverse perspectives and practices in learning builds pivotal skills. As Stevenson (2008) highlights, once educators meaningfully expand the content of learning from beyond the classroom, curriculum can come to facilitate opportunities that "develop creative and flexible problem solving – skills that are needed to address the complexities and uncertainties of creating sustainable communities and societies" (p.355). In agreement, Elmegren (2020) examines the integration of creative placemaking principles in standard course instruction as it can "bridge the gap between institutions of higher education and the communities they inhabit" (p.2). Considering these points, creative placemaking sheds light on the role of cocurricular spaces in terms of education. Engaging spaces that may be located outside usual spaces of classroom instruction, not only serves to expand students' understanding of course content but also deepen the affiliation students have with their local environments. It is these outcomes which echo concepts advocated by Grunewald (2003), in which engaging in place-based education deepens student's critical consciousness of themselves in terms of their instruction as the students and the world around them as global citizens. Therefore, engaging in creative placemaking which touches upon place-consciousness and interdisciplinarity that can provide institutions with opportunities to deepen traditional school learning. In the case of this research paper, creative placemaking can be an approach that reinforces post-secondary broader Jesuit universities missions of reinforcing

students' understanding of their positionality as actors in a larger nexus of dialogues, histories and communities (Fr. Lucas, 2021; Zitcer, 2018).

### **Thinking Creatively: Gallery Education and Arts Integration**

A beacon of creativity, galleries within learning institutions are not only compelling spaces which celebrate aesthetic projects but also are spaces that equip the arts as a means of education and discovery. As scholars recognize, the arts, and the spaces which welcome them, engage diverse audiences and facilitate experiences that supplement students' development (Alexander, 2003; Desai 2020; Lilliedahl, 2018). Additionally, researchers recognize how creative environments loosen academic boundaries between subjects, acting as sites of contemplation which can raise awareness of contemporary issues (Goralnik et al, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2015). As Saratsi (2019) remarks, "the arts operate outside, across and within disciplinary boundaries, interpenetrating different traditions and creating new practice through its distinctive modes of enquiry" (p.16). Literature also examines the social resonance that transpires when the arts inform teaching/learning strategies (Darts, 2004; Motola, 2016). Paying particular attention to the educational opportunities available when educational institutions integrate, scholars note the ways arts-led experiences can help deepen class content by making connections between course curriculum and social realities which afflict students and educators alike (Palmer, 2006; Smulyan, 2021; Suzen, 2020). By recognizing these multiple functions, academics expand the conception of the arts as being solely aesthetic by operationalizing them in interdisciplinary ways (Bleck, 2015; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006). Considering these array of functions, it is possible to see how the artistic environments including but not limited to university galleries can be framed as experiential places that alter or shift one's view of the world (Möersch & Sharp, 2003; Morsch, 2011; Sternfield, 2013). However, there is not much research



that clearly addresses the relationship between university galleries and the broader academic community of which they are located. In response, this project hopes to raise awareness of the dynamics between galleries and academics specifically through exhibitions presented by these spaces and classroom instruction transpiring simultaneously.

To begin, scholars define arts-integration as a cross-disciplinary approach that infuses creative methods within school-based learning that results in striking opportunities for student development alongside mastery of teaching content (Assante & Enescu, 2002). As research shows, creative spaces are opportune environments that can deepen student development or, at the very least, support the learning students encounter in their core curriculum (Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Miller, 2018; Morales, 2017). Similarly, as Duma & Silverstein's (2014) decade study of arts integration reveals, arts integration has become a successful way to engage students across multiple disciplines and is an effective strategy to improve classroom instruction and/or school-based learning. From a psychological standpoint, the arts have been observed to numerous functions beyond their 'aesthetics'; particularly, the arts can be seen as social practices which engage in community-building and reference local histories (Sherman & Morrissey, 2017; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; Wali et al, 2002). Noting this, engaging with the arts can not only nurture artistic appreciation but foster interpersonal skills such as empathy and self-awareness among critical 'systems thinking' skills (Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018). In other cases, scholars examine how the arts can increase student's cognitive development; particularly, in helping them deeply reflect on their overlapping position in a spectrum of public, political, and private life (Alexander, 2003; Millman, 2009; Webster & Wolfe, 2013).

Given their innate capacity to stimulate inquiry, creativity and curiosity that can support the learning of diverse subject areas, researchers acknowledge the role of the arts beyond their

principal aesthetic qualities (Goldman et al, 2016; Burnard et al, 2018; Payton, White & Mullins, 2020; Tishman & Palmer, 2006). Acknowledging the practical and conceptual functions of the arts, researchers recognize the ways in which creative experiences may promote equitable scholarly exchange and welcome expansive ways-of-thinking that may reduce communication gaps between the academic and public community (Ball et al, 2021; Terrant & Thiele, 2016). Confirming these perspectives, Sarasti et al (2019) highlights how the arts converge multiple perspectives, reframe perceptions, and engage audiences. Likewise recognizing the capacity of art to facilitate connections across disciplines, Darsø (2017) underscores the interdisciplinarity at the core of arts-based learning braids course content can connect with real-world issues. Highlighting the aesthetic experiences enhance scholarship as they push for flexibility in student learning as students 'vacillate' between different modes of intelligence, Webster & Wolfe (2013) claim that educational experiences which welcome the arts are ones that encourage a holistic development of the student surrounding their "cognitive, intellectual, emotional and physical dimensions" (p.23). Given these considerations, one can understand how beyond its intrinsic properties, the arts can be instrumental cross/interdisciplinary devices in democratizing educational practices and present information in ways that are accessible to diverse audiences.

Echoing the sentiments of Webster & Wolfe (2013), research examines the ways in which art-based learning operates in a manner that centers critical social justice frameworks (Bleck, 2015; Darts, 2004; Desai, 2020). Exploring how creative sites of learning may mediate experiences geared towards critical consciousness, Robinson (2015) illustrates how the arts stand at the intersection of education, social justice and critical thinking. Particularly, looking at art's flexibility to move "between multiple perspectives utilizing any available medium to respond...critically, creatively and often collectively on circumstances" (p.5). Likewise, Leroux

& Bernadska (2014) examine how the arts, beyond any particular academic context, can generativity contribute towards civic engagement. In agreement with art's contributions towards critical thought and action, Motola (2016) articulates art's inextricable relationship with historical and contemporary issues and in so doing conceptualizes art practices as being much more than aesthetic in nature. Also examining the impacts of arts-education rooted in social justice, Desai (2020) heralds the arts as an interrogative device that explores the human experience within real-world systems and societies. Specifically they comment “Art can allow us to develop a new shared understanding about the world that, in concert with political, social, and cultural institutions, can move the barometer of social change toward equity and justice” (p.21). It is in this sense, creative environments may be considered educational devices that raise the awareness of individuals of their role in a larger arena of histories and legacies.

The last body of research considers galleries and museums as places of inquiry that facilitate aesthetic experiences that reinforce scholarship. Recognizing the ways in which museums are remarkably visitor-centric, scholars note how such institutions prioritize the needs of audiences and in doing so emulate constructivist principles of learning (Hohenstein & Missouri, 2018). This, while still having to deal with logistical needs they braid these necessities with a constant operational strive to meet their audience’s needs (Murphy, 2018). Exploring the positive relationship between cultural spaces and educational principles, Amess (2018) study explores the outcomes of integrating of museums and galleries experiences outside students' formal learning settings by interviewing middle school students on their museum/gallery experiences. From this research, the study demonstrated the barriers students have in engaging in these spaces, and elicited the opportunities which may arise when participating in these spaces, “allowing them the skills to be active participants of these particular cultures” (p.55). In

agreement of how informal places can serve educational missions of learning and inquiry, this thesis tries to highlight how cocurricular spaces within the university operate as such compelling cultural spaces. Yet, recognizing the barriers of engaging in these places outside students' regular environments, this thesis also serves to celebrate the ways in which artistic spaces within formal scholastic settings can offer students with engaging spaces outside their structured learning. Recognizing exhibitions developed across three midwestern private Jesuit universities, Fr. Lucas (2021) articulates how cocurricular spaces such as galleries or museums can function as interdisciplinary devices that “connect with disciplines and programs across the spectrum” (p.7). More importantly, recognizing the Ignatian philosophy at the core of Jesuit education, Fr. Lucas makes a strong case as to how aesthetic experiences deepen scholarship. As it relates to this project, this thesis builds on the exploration of how university galleries play a role in the broader educational missions of the university while also underscoring the ways these spaces can reinforce classroom instruction as it pertains to the pedagogies of professors.

Scholars note the particular informal qualities of galleries which allows them to easily facilitate social connections and promote well-being but also serve to connect individuals with local cultures and histories (Lee & Northcott, 2021). Understanding the ways in which galleries forge opportunities for critical thinking, Illeris (2015) notes how these particular environments mediate experiences of ‘shared metareflection’ that “allow for educators and participants to work together to question and challenge naturalized assumptions about teaching and learning” (p.22). Recognizing the value of museums and considering the ways in which those nestled in academic institutions operate, Mayer (2003) articulates the intersectional nature of university museums as sites of community collaboration all while also being cultural organizations which are enmeshed in higher education institutions.

In summary, literature in the field of arts integration and gallery education affirm galleries as aesthetic environments which facilitate contemplation and inquiry through sensory experiences. As researchers note, equipping arts principles, galleries engage forms of learning that may operate outside traditional classroom modalities but which nonetheless serve students in constructive ways (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021; Darts, 2004; Erbitz, 2007). Although research recognizes the significance of the arts and the need to integrate it more effectively in subject areas beyond the arts, there is not much literature that looks at the ways in which galleries within academic institutions celebrate the arts in these needed manner. Additionally, there is not much research which examines the ways it can facilitate inter/cross disciplinary experiences that advance academic scholarship. Recognizing their creative nature while equally considering the educational dynamic these spaces hold given their cocurricular positioning on campus, this thesis builds on emerging research that highlights the learning opportunities that transpire in these spaces and how they may buttress educational experiences (Illeris, 2015; Mayer, 2003). Acknowledging this viewpoint, one can observe university art galleries as intersectional environments which promote scholarship and aesthetics. This considered, galleries within higher-education hold a unique place, at once anchored to the larger mission of student development while also buttressing the learning students experience in their classroom.

### **SUMMARY**

Spanning three research domains, this literature review highlighted how university galleries may be considered places that converge subject areas across diverse academic disciplines. Examining the principles of creative placemaking, this literature review uncovered an exciting lens that champions the role of the arts in terms of social development. Applying this framework towards cocurricular environments, it became evident how university galleries may

engage college campuses given its ties to the arts and its centralized location in learning institutions. Gathering research surrounding inter/transdisciplinarity and arts-integration this literature review offered us a way to recognize the advantages of facilitating formal learning in creative and complex ways. From such considerations, one may appreciate how cocurricular spaces facilitate experiences that stimulate inquiry and contemplation and in certain cases encourage perspectives which respond to intersectional issues occurring in the broader world (Sharifan & Moore, 2020; Stirling & Kerr, 2015).

The first section, *Fusing Disciplines: The Significance of Inter/transdisciplinarity*, explores educational practices that weave together multiple ways-of-knowing or s, emphasizing how the synthesis of academic disciplines may call attention to real-world issues (Taylor, 2020). Taking this into account, one can appreciate how these learning dynamics may inform or reimagine the knowledge-production transpiring in post-secondary institutions. The second section, *Operationalizing Space: Creative Placemaking in Education*, explores the applications of the arts in learning settings. As outlined by researchers, the arts are welcoming spaces that invite multiple audiences and perspectives which in turn allow them to curate equitable programs (Raunig, 2007; Beyerbach & Ramalho, 2011). In the case of this project, these thoughts can frame the way we view arts-engagement in higher-education. The third domain, *Thinking Creatively: Gallery Education and Arts Integration*, showcases the outcomes that arise when art informs curriculum or is used as an approach towards learning (Hetland & Winner, 2001; Lilliedahl, 2018). Specifically, the ways in which university galleries may be considered an approach that can allow individuals to develop their identities and voices while also deepening their critical thinking (Beyerbach & Ramalho, 2011). Considering the close relationship between galleries and the arts, this section offers an understanding of galleries as educational places

which have the capacity to complement and complexify learning through the arts (Burnard et al, 2018; Mörsch, 2011). Sparking dialogue, forging opportunities for self-expression, harnessing diverse perspectives to raise awareness on social occurrences, promoting creative and imaginative epistemologies, it is possible to see how spaces welcoming to the arts are experiential places that alter or shift one's view of the world (Ishii, 2018; Schubert & Gray, 2015; Thompson, 2012).

It is evident that integrating the artistic environments in formal course instruction may buttress student's learning with opportunities for creativity, imagination and self expression (Katsaros-Molzahn, 2020). As Wright, Down & Davies (2020) explain, creative spaces are sites of cohesion as they utilize a 'social-aesthetic frame' that equips the arts to encourage contemplation and participation. This considered, arts-based spaces such as university galleries hold 'interstitial' and 'synergistic' positions on campus as they allow for academic community members from all disciplines to come together (Marshall, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2015). Engaging the senses while also quiet and contemplative, galleries are multidimensional as they approach larger concepts of the 'common good' while also threading one's individual experience as they illuminate the human condition (Illeris, 2003). Because of this dynamic quality, galleries are synergistic sites where cross-disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity can emerge. Curating thematic exhibitions that explore intersectional issues, these sites offer a creative form of knowledge production rooted in an arts oriented framework. When taking these observations into account one can come to understand that University Galleries are unique places which actively nurture the scholarship already occurring at post-secondary institutions.



**CHAPTER THREE:  
METHODS**





## RESEARCH DESIGN

Offering compelling aesthetic experiences that encompass interdisciplinary topics, University galleries are cocurricular spaces of inquiry that engage a wide academic audience. Acknowledging how these places may stand apart from the modes of instruction frequently used in classrooms by academics, this project shed light on the opportunities that arise when curricular instruction and gallery-based learning converge. Exploring their differences and potential synergies, this project asked professors to reflect upon their perceptions of the Thacher Gallery as a classroom partner. Specifically, this project used a qualitative research design to harness the perspectives of university faculty who integrated a visit to the gallery into their course instruction during the 2021-2022 academic year. Engaging in conversation with academics from diverse disciplines and academic backgrounds, this project aimed to cultivate a nuanced understanding of the role the gallery plays in the USF community by uncovering qualities that make the gallery complimentary to classroom instruction while also highlighting possible areas for improvement.

Partnering with the director and the manager of the Thacher Gallery staff throughout the development of this project, this thesis also holds some community implications (Handley et al, 2010). Consulting with the gallery staff, the researcher ensured the project's outcomes would support present and future gallery efforts. At the beginning stages of the thesis, the focus of the project was to capture students' voices and experiences pertaining to the exhibitions curated at the gallery during the 2021-2022 academic year. However, given difficulties in acquiring enough students to engage in interviews while also honoring the gallery's established rapport with faculty members, it became evident that engaging in a project that reflected the voices of faculty would be more feasible. Remaining committed to the project's initial interest in exploring how

university galleries contribute to student learning, the researcher decided to collect faculty members' teaching experiences to examine the way the gallery engages the academic community.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Focusing on the first-hand experiences of university faculty through semi-structured interviews, the project aimed to capture the differing perceptions of the gallery in a variety of educational contexts. Informed by these conversations, the study hoped to arrive at a general understanding of professors' responses to the Thacher Gallery exhibition *All That You Touch: Art & Ecology* which premiered at the university in the Fall of 2021. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to support phenomenological and grounded-theory methodological approaches.

With a phenomenological approach in mind, this work collected the perceptions of multiple individuals in order to arrive at key themes (Salamon, 2018; Guenther, 2019). In addition to phenomenology, this thesis utilized grounded theory. As Charmaz (2006) explains, grounded theory engages elements of phenomenology which seeks to understand specific experiences through dialog. However, instead of using research (i.e., interviews) to prove or affirm a concept already formulated, grounded theory stands apart as it uses research to arrive at a new theory or concept altogether. As Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019) explore, grounded theory is a qualitative methodology which is utilized when not much is known about a particular area or domain. In the case of this project, as there is not much research that examines academic perspectives on co-curricular art spaces, this methodology aligns with these principles which seek to explore unexamined topics. Additionally, equipping grounded theory, this research was particularly inductive not only engaging but honoring its participants as thought-partners to arrive at new insights. In doing so, these methods helped obtain a clear understanding of the

unique experiences that arise in gallery settings within postsecondary institutions based upon the perspectives of participants. Ultimately, these two qualitative approaches can help higher education leaders alongside academics obtain a clear understanding of the unique experiences that arise in gallery settings within postsecondary institutions.

### **PROCEDURE**

The researcher interviewed university professors from a variety of departments at the University of San Francisco (USF) to highlight the relationship the Thacher Gallery holds with the academic community. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to welcome flexibility and allow for conversational tangents to develop which may not be predictable in terms of protocol (Adams, 2015). In addition, honoring COVID19 and confidentiality concerns, participants were virtually interviewed over zoom on an individual basis.

All participants responded to the same series of questions. To begin, participants were asked to share their academic backgrounds and role at the university to shed light on their positionalities and research interests. Secondly, participants were asked to recount the ways in which they became aware of the Thacher Gallery. In doing so, participants were allowed to explain their evolving awareness and understanding of the gallery alongside their own teaching. Thirdly, participants were asked to detail their particular experience with integrating a visit to the Thacher Gallery during the Fall 2021 semester. During this period of time, participants were asked follow-up questions that encouraged them to recount their observations of their class in addition to reflecting on how the gallery may have complemented their pedagogical aims.

After discussing their experiences as they related to the Fall 2021 exhibition, participants were prompted to discuss their evolving views on university galleries during their time at the university. Subsequently, the interview concluded with questions that encouraged participants to

think about future gallery programs as well as reflect on the gallery's location at the university. These final questions were open-ended as they inquired upon the logistical aspects of the gallery. Responses to these questions were formatted as suggestions and comments towards future exhibitions. Answers which collect the personal impressions and working experiences of university professors in hopes of approaching a holistic understanding of the gallery's relationship with the academic community. An interview protocol is included in the appendix.

## RESEARCH LOGISTICS

### Location

The research setting for this project was at a medium-sized private Jesuit university known as the University of San Francisco (USF). Known for its urban location in the California Bay Area, 12:1 faculty ratio, and liberal arts curriculum, USF is a higher-education institution that serves both ~5,000 undergraduate students and ~4,000 graduate students across a wide range of disciplines<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, this project examines the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery, which is located within the main academic library on campus known as the Gleeson Library.

### Duration

During the 2021-2022 academic year, Thacher Gallery presented a series of exhibitions to the academic community exploring themes which relate to ecology and environmental justice. Utilizing creativity and the arts to examine real-world issues, these exhibitions presented opportunities for faculty and students at USF from various disciplines to engage with the Gallery. Interested in the engagements that transpired during this time, this project focuses on the collaborations which arose between professors and the gallery during the *All That You Can Touch: Art and Ecology* exhibition presented to the academic community in the Fall of 2021. To

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on USFCA Enrollment Data, view <https://myusf.usfca.edu/cipe/usf-facts>

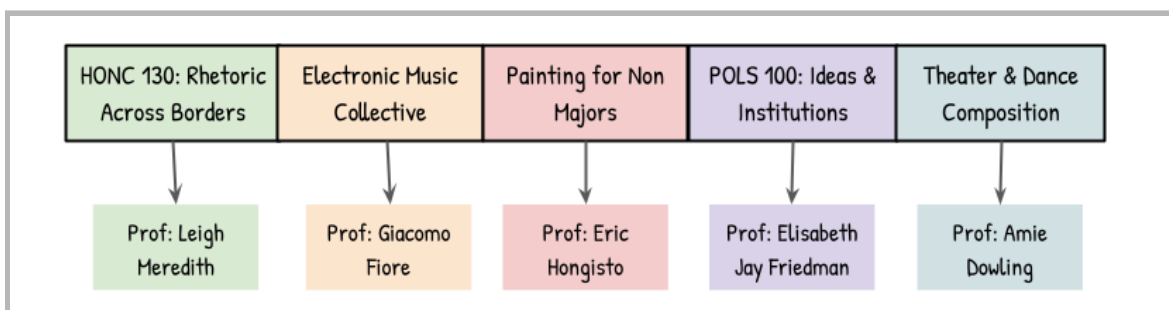
obtain an understanding of the range of experiences that occurred at the Thatcher Gallery during the Fall 2021 exhibition, the research was conducted during the Spring 2022 Semester.

## Participants

The researcher conducted virtual semi-structured interviews with five university professors who decided to involve their class with the gallery during the Fall 2021 semester. Given the specificity of participants (i.e., faculty from the immediate institution), the research utilized a convenience sample. As remarked by, Eitkan, Musa, & Alkassim (2016), "convenience sampling...is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study" (p.2). Although all participants are professors at the university in question, they come from different academic backgrounds and hold different roles at the institution. For example, three of the participants are full time faculty, while two of the participants are part time faculty. Regardless of these differences, all participants were asked specific questions surrounding their decision to involve themselves with the gallery, in addition to open-ended questions about their general perspective of university galleries. Detailing the range of participants included in the project, the graphic below outlines how the study pools in faculty from different disciplines.

### Figure 2

*Quality Research Plan, Visual Map of Participants*



*Note.* This figure was created to visualize the range and diversity of professors interviewed.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data collection method for participants was through interviews. Before interviewing, all participants were electronically given interview consent forms to review and sign. Once these forms were submitted, the interviewer scheduled virtual meetings with each participant by sending each participant access to an online booking platform known as *Doodle*. After engaging in a recorded 45-60 minute virtual interview with participants, the researcher engaged in a qualitative content analysis that consisted of transcribing and categorizing the conversations. As Bengtson, (2016) describes, “the process of analysis reduces the volume of text collected, identifies and groups categories together and seeks some understanding of it” (p.8).

Transferring oral conversations to a textual format, each conversation was electronically downloaded from the video conferencing platform *Zoom* and copied onto separate *Google Document* files. Shortly after, the researcher engaged in an initial transcription process which consisted of cross-referencing each audio recording with its corresponding raw text in order to ensure that all dialogue was captured correctly. Once transcripts were formatted and edited for errors, the researcher began to annotate each transcript by taking notes on the side of each document; in doing so, the researcher coupled discrete segments of data with descriptive labels that could begin to thematically interpret participants' responses. An example is visualized below.

### Figure 3

#### *Annotated Transcript Example*

Codes	Transcript	Notes
Positionality	Researcher: I am a first-generation masters student at USF in the school of education. I am interested in seeing the perception of a gallery from faculty at the University of San Francisco.	Researcher is explaining their positionality

During this time, the researcher highlighted recurring patterns in each transcript paying specific attention as to how participants responded to the similar interview questions. To keep track of the different patterns arising, the researcher color-coded key phrases and keywords. Delineating patterns in this manner, the researcher was able to visually identify emergent themes that were present across all interviews. Once these themes were identified, the researcher created analytical memos, extracting direct quotes and observations from each transcript to organize evidence to support the researchers' identified themes.

### **PLAN OF PROTECTION FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS**

This study was approved by the Internal Review Board with a blanket IRB Protocol #1438. The IRB was created to protect all professors who elected to participate in the study. In order to ensure that all participants engaged in this project did so willingly, the researcher communicated the full scope of the project and its intended uses. In addition to offering context, the researcher was in constant communication with each individual and allowed for multiple spaces for clarifying questions. The benefits of participating in this study were also discussed to participants. First, in supporting a project that examines how the Thacher Gallery—alongside university galleries in general— can be considered valuable spaces that deepen class instruction and student learning And, secondly, offer suggestions which can shed light that can assist the gallery in deepening its aims of being an academic resource to a wide array of disciplines on campus. No monetary or financial benefits were offered to the participants of this study.

### **RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND**

It is important to recognize the researcher's background and its influences on the study. For example, the researcher's experience in higher-education is influenced by their studies in art history and museum studies in addition to their working experience in student affairs. Having

spent six years at the university, as an undergraduate and graduate student at USF, the researcher has developed a close appreciation and awareness of the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery. Over time, the researcher has had the privilege of not only visiting the gallery, but supporting the gallery's programming as a curator in the 2018 *Thacher Art + Architecture Annual: Eudaimonia*<sup>5</sup> and most recently as a juror for the 2022 *Thacher Art + Architecture Annual: The Light is Still On*.<sup>6</sup> Given the researcher's involvement with the gallery and familiarity with principles of student development, this thesis is informed by an innate interest to explore the ways the gallery can participate in the academic community. Considering their enthusiasm for the arts and student development, the researcher acknowledges how their particular experiences may differ from the knowledge and expertise of research participants as it relates to their role as professors.

## LIMITATIONS

Acknowledging the scope of the project and its methodology, the following three limitations in terms of this thesis' research have been identified:

- I. Sampling procedure and sample size:** Although this work seeks to shed light on the potential art-based centers on university campuses hold, this project focuses primarily on the demographics and population respective to USF and uses convenience sampling.
- II. Timeframe of the study:** As a masters thesis, this study is limited by the length of the program. Therefore, it only focuses on a particular season of the gallery. Further and prolonged research of student and faculty responses could deepen the findings of this project.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this program, view <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery/thacher-annual-19>

<sup>6</sup> For more information on this program, view <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery/the-light-is-still-on>





**CHAPTER FOUR:  
FINDINGS**

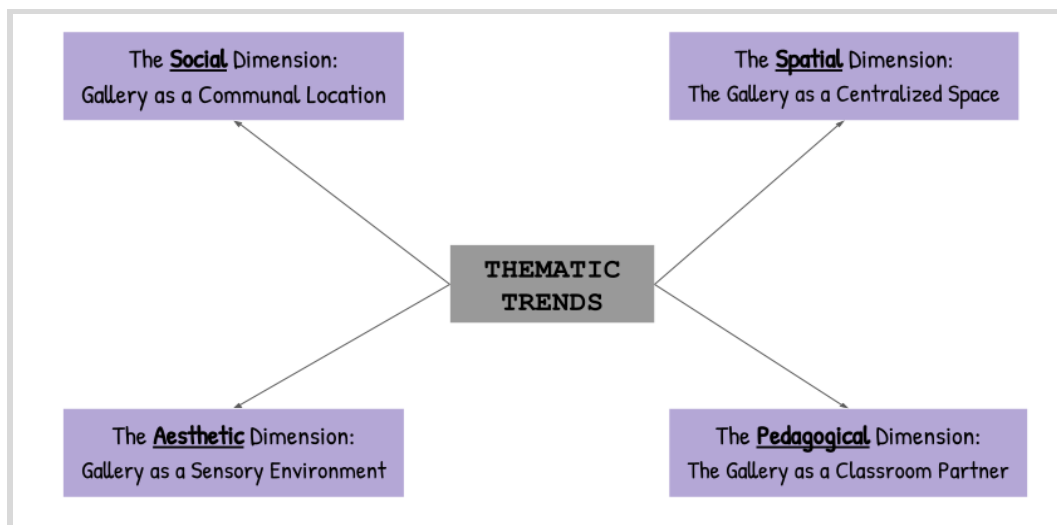


## INTRODUCTION

As detailed on the university website<sup>7</sup>, the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery curates diverse high-caliber art exhibitions that promote the university's interest in social justice. Conducting interviews with five professors, this project collected first-hand perspectives of the gallery, comparing them to pre-existing definitions set in place by the gallery. Considering their role as faculty members, participants discussed their evolving understanding of the gallery given its involvement with the academic community and students' formal learning. Upon review of these interviews, four thematic trends emerged, illustrated in the visual graphic below:

**Figure 4**

*The Four Identified Themes from Research*



*Note.* graphic showcasing the four thematic findings from coding and analyzing transcripts.

As can be seen, each thematic domain sheds light on a discrete aspect of the gallery. In terms of the *pedagogical dimension*, this area highlights participant's reflections on the educational opportunities the galleries offered. Particularly, in relation to the ways in which the thematic content underlying exhibitions overlapped with class content across disciplines. In

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<sup>7</sup> Thacher Gallery, University of San Francisco <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery>

terms of the *aesthetic dimension*, this area reflects participants' response towards the creative aspects of the gallery. Namely, the ways in which the artistic exhibitions were operationalized to engage the senses. With regards to the *spatial dimension*, this thematic area considers the location of the gallery, paying close attention as to how its position within the university informed its relationship with the academic community. And lastly, in terms of the *social dimension*, this thematic area highlighted the ways the gallery was interpreted as a communal space. Specifically, how participants interpreted the gallery as a co-curricular environment that welcomed educators, administrators and students alike.

When all four of these areas are jointly taken into consideration, the gallery's multifaceted role within the university is clear. In certain cases the gallery operates as a classroom partner, while in other cases it is interpreted as a unique sensory environment all of its own. Certain times the gallery was perceived as a cosmopolitan place, and at other times participants viewed the gallery as a co-curricular space which advanced the university's underlying educational mission. The following sections will go into detail of these four thematic domains, offering first hand examples of participants' responses.

### **The Gallery's Pedagogical Dimension**

All participants gave their rationale behind incorporating a class visit to Thacher Gallery's fall 2021 exhibition, *All That You Can Touch: Art and Ecology*.<sup>8</sup> In these conversations, participants collectively agreed that visiting the gallery assisted students in their apprehension of class content. However, participants' explanations differed when explaining how the fall exhibition complemented their instruction. In some instances, visits to the gallery occurred when a professor's curriculum and the gallery's exhibition shared a thematic overlap. In these cases, it

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<sup>8</sup> For more information surrounding the Gallery's Fall Exhibition visit <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery/all-that-you-touch>

was the conceptual parallels between the exhibition's topic and broader class goals that excited professors and compelled them to bring their class. At other times, participants accredited the gallery capacity to modify exhibition tours as a motivating factor to engage with the gallery. In these cases, professors saw gallery staff engage as classroom partners who could attend to their particular pedagogies/needs as educators.

Connecting the exhibition's thematic content with class topics, Dr. Meredith framed her visit to the gallery as an opportunity to reinforce her pedagogical aims. Teaching an undergraduate course in the department of rhetoric and communication, Honors 130: Rhetoric Across Borders, Dr. Meredith noted how visiting the exhibition could assist students as they developed a visual rhetoric vocabulary closely tied to the course's final project. It was these overlaps in addition to the observed potential to deepen core concepts which beckoned Dr. Meredith to incorporate a visit to the gallery in her class. For instance, she commented:

We had spent a lot of time thinking about written and oral arguments and not as much time thinking about visual arguments and so that's really why I wanted to bring students into the gallery....for our purposes it was perfect to have this mixed media exhibition.

Appreciating the design of the exhibition, Dr. Meredith framed her visit to the gallery as an opportunity for students to develop visual arguments outside her classroom. Later in the interview, reflecting on her understanding of the gallery as a teaching resource, she shared:

Every class that I teach where I don't have any Thacher Gallery involvement feels like a missed opportunity. When I first came to the university, I saw galleries or Thacher Gallery as a nice thing that you might encounter individually or on your own but not something that...would have applicability to other fields. And so really thinking about it and now experiencing it, it really has all of these ties to almost every field. There's almost always something that Thacher Gallery can bring to your class.

This response, among others, shed light on academics' evolving awareness of the gallery as an asset to instruction. As was the case with Dr. Meredith, the gallery may be unbeknownst to

university faculty in terms of its pedagogical ties to course instruction. At first, it may feel as a passive space apart from the learning that occurs in formal class environments; however, as highlighted by Dr. Meredith, the gallery does sometimes overlap with professors' curriculum.

Other professors also expressed the ways in which the exhibition's thematic concepts overlapped with their teaching goals. This was the case with Dr. Hongisto, a professor in the department of art and architecture. Reflecting on their decision to bring their Painting for Non-Majors course to the gallery and contextualizing it with previous collaborations with the gallery during their time teaching at USF, he remarked:

Gallery shows were directly tied to themes and we could put those themes directly into our courses. So, I would invite my painting class to go see them and find either a favorite work or something that connects to their current assignment or something thematic that we could tie in together... as an educational experience.

Dr. Friedman, a professor in the department of politics, echoed Dr. Fiore's sentiments of the gallery's academic resourcefulness when recounting her particular decision to integrate a class visit to the Fall 2021 exhibition. Connecting the topics presented in the exhibition with broader concepts being approached in her course POLS 101: Intro to Politics, Dr. Friedman commented:

I knew I was going to be teaching in the introductory sequence for our majors...I was sure that I could do something to bring environmental perspectives into my teaching and into students' learning, even though we are not focused on environmental studies... [Thacher Gallery] was doing the artistic version of something that I have become sort of deeply and existentially aware of in my own life.

Similar to Dr. Meredith's interpretation of her gallery visit as a way to approach teaching goals relating to visual literacy, Dr. Friedman conceptualized the gallery as a space that complexified her class curriculum. However, unlike Dr. Meredith or Dr. Hongisto who saw their gallery visit as a way to meet a learning objective, Dr. Friedman broadly interpreted her visit as a means to raise students' awareness of perspectives that were supplementary to the main themes of her

class. Comparing these visits, it is evident that professors recognize the gallery as an environment that may align with the learning students encounter in their courses. However, the degree into which they contributed to pedagogical aims varies. As exhibitions are presented to the academic community, some professors may find the gallery's thematic concepts closely tied to their discipline; whereas, in other cases, professors may perceive the exhibitions' advancement of real world issues as separate from their subject matter. Still, in all cases, professors factored their involvement with the university gallery due to its applicability to their curriculum.

In different instances, interviewees took special note of the gallery's revolving exhibitions and continually changing thematic program. Recognizing the gallery's topical qualities, participants interpreted these aspects as being an influential factor in establishing differing degrees of reception between the gallery and the academic community. As explained by Professor Dowling, an arts-based faculty in the department of Performing Arts and Social Justice, teaching Theater & Dance Composition:

Some professors don't work with the environment, so this year might not have been their cup of tea. In previous years, there might have been more of a social justice idea based on society and culture or cultural diversity and then some professors will engage differently.

In this case, Professor Dowling highlighted how the gallery oscillates from becoming a strong focal point in certain academic years to being at the periphery of academic's interest in others. This finding is important as it acknowledges that the gallery is thematically driven. However, an obstacle of this topical nature, is that as the exhibitions shift year-to-year different academic audiences may be compelled by the gallery. These comments were also identified by Dr. Friedman, who only recently had engaged with the gallery as part of their class. She shared:

To be honest, I couldn't name the themes from previous years, though, I would say that I'm dimly aware that there's a theme...but the signage up the front of the library, there's often a "here's what's going on in Thacher Gallery" and that drew my awareness to it.

These different relationships between academics and the gallery, demonstrate how at the very least there are visual cues that signal to academics the existence of the gallery and its thematic nature. In certain ways, this allows for new partnerships to arise but may result in previous partnerships to lay dormant until a timely overlap arises again.

Considering the dynamics participants experienced while engaging with the exhibitions, interviewees shed light on the adaptability and responsiveness of the gallery. In terms of adaptability, participants stressed how gallery staff personalized content in tailoring exhibition tours in ways that were resonant to the educator's teaching. With respect to responsiveness, professors interpreted the gallery as an interactive environment that could stimulate and engage classes in creativity. Reflecting on an instance where gallery staff provided personalized tours, Dr. Meredith remarked:

If we're talking about collaborative generation of knowledge, I think I really see that in action at Thacher Gallery... There's already some infrastructure already built in, where the curators at the gallery can actually work with you and help you develop a curriculum and for every exhibit they develop their own tour. It's a lot easier to kind of fit that in once you feel like there's some structure and support

Considering the gallery adjustment towards class themes, Dr. Meredith's comment helped showcase the educational applications of the gallery. For, in her case, it became evident that engaging with the exhibition not only provided classes with an alternative environment to process course material, but also functioned as a space that could interweave course topics directly into what would otherwise be a general experience.

Dr. Fiore gave valuable insights on the gallery's function as a dynamic teaching environment that interlinks course material with pre-established exhibition concepts. An adjunct professor in the department of Performing Arts and Social Justice (PASJ), Dr. Fiore discussed

how his Electric Sound Collective course engaged with the gallery by producing live music performances that responded to exhibition themes. He shared:

There is a way for us to do things that are responsive to what's going on in the gallery. Students can be somewhat involved in curating a musical piece...which is complicated, but that's kind of what I'd like. I'm trying to get the students in charge of the programming itself

Detailing his student's experience with the gallery, Dr. Fiore pointed out the way the environment presented itself to students as a creative space that encourages interaction. This materialized, according to Dr. Fiore, in class projects which responded to the concepts or content presented by the exhibition.

Similar to how Dr. Fiore's class responded directly to thematic concepts driving the fall exhibition, Professor Dowling's Theater & Dance Composition course likewise responded to the exhibition in composing a score. Professor Dowling explained these collaborations between her class and the exhibition in detail:

We went and we had a tour. We then asked the students to kind of extract from that experience a score based off of the exhibit ...as a way to develop and create something. Whether it's language or movement....it's kind of this whole ecology of creativity

Explaining how her class interacted with the exhibition, Professor Dowling observed her students first engaging with the gallery as visitors and then subsequently as active respondents by developing projects of their own. Considering both Professor Dowling and Dr. Fiore's observations, it became clear that the gallery was a dynamic environment that encouraged students to not only absorb but in certain instances respond to the thematic matter underlying exhibitions. As underscored by most interviews, the gallery was perceived as a flexible space that accommodates the varying pedagogical interests of educators. Instead of being a passive environment where individuals encountered the exhibition in a singular fashion, professors were



surprised to know that the gallery could modify itself to align with the educator's pedagogical interests.

Ultimately, the data provided evidence that participants held differing interpretations of the gallery's educational role. The pedagogical applications of the gallery were most salient when participants provided different examples as to how the gallery complemented their class instruction. Some professors viewed the gallery as a unique exhibition space that provided opportunities for educators to present class topics through an alternative environment. In other cases, participants were compelled by the thematic concepts curated in exhibitions and how the ideas presented in the gallery echoed concepts raised in their own curriculum.

### **The Gallery's Aesthetic Dimension**

Participants revealed how they made *sense of* and made *use of* the creative elements of the gallery. Interpreting the artistic elements of the gallery, professors recognized the environment's multimodality as a device that could captivate the senses and thereby engage students. Recognizing the diverse artworks and arforms presented in exhibitions, professors understood how the senses of audiences could be captivated in the gallery. Another way participants discerned aesthetic elements was the gallery's connection to broader institutional philosophies. Namely, the gallery's integration of topics related to social justice. Contextualizing the art exhibitions in this way, participants interpreted the gallery as a co-curricular space that advanced the Jesuit institution's principles of community inclined scholarship.<sup>9</sup> As will be seen in this section, when these key factors of engagement and critical inquiry are synthesized, the gallery shines as an artistic space.

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<sup>9</sup> For a deeper historical analysis of the ties between the University of San Francisco and the ignatian-jesuit tradition read Ziajka, A. (2021) "The Mission Statements of the University of San Francisco: An Historical Analysis" (2021). <https://repository.usfca.edu/hist/8>

Across interviews, professors were drawn to the way the arts engaged the senses of students in new and refreshing ways. Standing apart from instruction that uses finite ways of thinking and learning, professors were drawn to how the art in the gallery stimulated the senses and sparked students' engagement. Dr. Fiore, observing the ways in which students engaged with curators and the gallery space, indicated that students seemed alert and responsive to the space in ways that were higher at times than their own course. As he commented:

Through the 40 minute visit or so [students] got more and more engaged...I was surprised that they talked more than they do to me sometimes... there was something about the context and the difference that felt less like a class and more like a moment that made them feel more comfortable to speak up in those spaces.

According to Dr. Fiore, the dynamic of his class modified during the tour of the exhibition, as students engaged differently once exposed to the gallery. Offering suggestions as to why this may have occurred, Dr. Fiore's comments highlight how the gallery's artistic environment may have evoked an 'alternativeness' that prompted students to adjust their behaviors. Similarly recounting the degree to which students immersed themselves in the gallery space, Dr. Meredith noted how the gallery visit yielded a high-level of engagement. She commented:

I see the students being more continuous, throughout the entire class period, engaged... It's almost more of a self-directed element I feel in the gallery sessions, because you can wander away and do your own thinking and looking and come back which is more beneficial for the flow of class.

From these observations, it was clear that the cadence of engagement differed from in-class instruction. This was largely due to the gallery's open-ended qualities, in which students were free to explore the numerous visual mediums available and move through the environment at their own preferred pace. In Dr. Meredith's and Dr. Fiore's observations, exposing students to an artistic environment ushered in a new dimension of experience that expanded the way students could engage in their respective courses.

Considering the way the gallery's design and its implications for learning, Dr. Hongisto underscored qualities that made the environment stand out from other academic spaces on campus. For example, he shared:

Hmm academic spaces....Well there's the whole fact that in classrooms there's planned situations and Thacher is a bit more open... People can come and go, and the public can come as well, so that's one of the first parts that's different from academics on campus is that they encourage a larger public to be involved, or at least that's the mission of the gallery. What's really interesting, I think, is Thacher's mission which is showcasing California art and working with social justice ideas.

Dr. Hongisto's descriptions of the gallery as being "open" in comparison to typical sites of instruction, shed light on the operationalization of the artistic elements of the gallery. Namely, that the arts could be used as a tool for educators to approach broader concepts. Operating outside a singular discipline and thinking across subject areas, the gallery's wide ranging freedom through the arts, proved to be a place that celebrates creativity and a space that encourages contemplation about social justice and real-world issues.

Interpreting the ways the artistic components of the gallery influenced class instruction, participants pointed out how the gallery encouraged students to engage in new ways that were absent hitherto their exposure to the gallery. Noting the gallery facilitation of embodied forms of learning in addition to offering opportunities for contemplation, Dr. Friedman shared:

[The gallery] has this other way for us to engage with our senses, our emotions, our intellectual capacities, because it's mediated through art...It's almost tactile or embodied learning and thacher gallery can really you know do that in a different way than I could.

Acknowledging the sensory experiences presented to students in the exhibition, Dr. Friedman recognized the gallery utilization of the arts to facilitate a type of learning she herself was unable to achieve alone. This consideration also came up in other conversations with Dr. Hongisto. At a

similar point in his interview, he described the gallery as an intriguing and open-ended experience. He shared:

I was immediately struck by the fact that we're inside the library, which is a different kind of gallery space than usual...[the gallery] maximizes the space and makes it comfy and interesting and also casual for the students to build a walk in and experience an art gallery instead of walking into a white cube for instance.

In comparison to commercial galleries that typically are designed in “white cube” fashion, Dr. Hongisto recognized how the art gallery differs in being more inviting and welcoming audience interactions beyond passive observation. Interpreting the artistic elements of the gallery in a cumulative sense, Dr. Friedman and Dr. Hongisto conceptualized the gallery’s aesthetic elements in a broader perspective, appreciating the convergence of multiple artforms in presenting their class with a stimulating environment that engages the senses and encourages participation.

It was evident that participants interpreted the artistic elements of the space as engaging and exciting. However, participants not only interpreted the aesthetic dimension in terms of their teaching. In other cases, a few participants interpreted the aesthetic qualities of the gallery as indirectly echoing the institution’s broader educational mission. When asked about their view of the gallery aside from their particular experience collaborating with the gallery in the Fall of 2021, Professor Dowling stated:

I always find the exhibits really intriguing. I have this sense that they are mission driven...it follows a Jesuit mission of care for the whole person, a deep awareness of injustice and the need for justice not at home but around the world and that kind of thing drives the exhibits.

Professor Dowling’s response considers the gallery as a creative space that may offer students opportunities to interject their own experiences and identities. On the other hand, when explaining how the gallery shared pedagogical overlaps with professors, conversations underscored the degree to which the gallery echoed the mission of the larger university. For

example, besides noting the direct connections to her curriculum, Dr. Meredith understood the gallery as a sensorium that could introduce students to larger topics concerning global citizenry.

As she remarked:

Thacher Gallery is thinking about this idea of art not only for aesthetic purposes, but also for social justice and so that's also particularly apropos for my classes...Thacher Gallery again is not only representing visual communication writ large but visual advocacy.

Dr. Meredith understood the visual elements of the gallery as not only designed for sensory experiences, but also to approach and unpack complex issues. As Dr. Meredith and Professor Downing observed, the gallery's art exhibitions presented students with opportunities to immerse themselves both physically by exploring the works present in the environment and conceptually by dwelling on complex themes underlying the works themselves. Recognizing these identified qualities, it became evident that the gallery can provide students with experiences that differ from the way students typically engage in formal learning spaces and in so doing, showcased the gallery's ability to provide students with principles of Jesuit education that place value on the holistic experiences that echo the university's broader Jesuit phillophies.

In summary, participants interpreted the artistic elements of the gallery in different manners. Some saw the gallery's aesthetic components as supportive of their class instruction. In these conversations, participants recognized the gallery's ability to create sensory experiences that stood outside students' formal learning but which could still nurture their scholarship. In other cases, the gallery was seen as a flexible space of its own which stood outside any particular pedagogical area. In these cases, participants identified the wide ranging sensory experience as being a key factor in uplifting learning experiences. Surprisingly, it was in these moments where the gallery upheld broader missions of the university. Collectively, findings did reveal that participants' resonated with the gallery's presentation of multiple modalities. It was for these

particular reasons that the gallery shined as an artistic hub that could present audiences with eclectic experiences—encounters which stirred contemplation and stimulated the senses.

### **The Gallery's Spatial Dimension**

When explaining how they became aware of the gallery, professors frequently accredited the space's central location on campus and its enmeshment within the university library. In these conversations, professors acknowledged the gallery's ties to a pivotal academic space on campus. It was these considerations which highlighted the accessibility and close proximity of the gallery. More importantly, having already conceptualized the library as an educational resource, in many cases interviewees projected this pre-established scholarly conception of the space towards the gallery. Correspondingly, the gallery became perceived as an extension to the library and thereby a resource. Taking these spatial aspects of the gallery into consideration, the data framed the gallery as a convenient space that could provide academics access to a sensory experience.

When explaining the reasons behind incorporating the gallery in curriculum, participants attributed their involvement with the gallery due its physical proximity. For example, Dr. Hongisto perceived the gallery as a convenient campus space to deepen student's understanding of artistic principles in a general education art class. Explaining the reason why they took their course Art 106: Painting For Non-Majors to the gallery, Dr. Hongisto stated:

We couldn't really do as much as we thought we could because of the post-pandemic rules. So, the gallery was the lifeline...the students could go individually, we could go as a group, and then we could follow up.... that's the best part about Thacher. It is right next to us and we can use it.

As Dr. Hongisto highlights, given ongoing COVID19 restrictions related to the pandemic, off-campus excursions to arts institutions proved to be more difficult. The continued availability of the gallery in light of these obstacles reinforced faculty's awareness of the gallery as an

on-campus resource willing to serve the educational aims of instructors from all disciplines.

Affirming Dr. Hongisto's perspective, other participants also factored the gallery's central location on campus as informing its resourcefulness. As Dr. Meredith remarked when explaining their decision to bring students to the gallery:

Just being in a physical space with a tangible artifact, you have such a different mode of encountering. That's why the Thacher Gallery was just this amazing opportunity to give students that experience. I mean the [DeYoung Museum] is an amazing resource right there in [Golden Gate Park], but it still gets hard to get there in an hour and 40 minute class, let alone a 65 minute class. So, this is a way to do that and this is the best opportunity to do that on campus.

As indicated by participants' responses, the gallery being at a proximal distance offered educators a convenient way to provide students access to a sensory experience.

In addition to factoring the gallery's central location on campus, participants accredited the gallery's emplacement inside the library as informing their awareness of the space. For instance, considering the orientation of the gallery in the library, Dr. Fiore commented:

[Gleeson Library] is nice and central....That centrality is fantastic and everybody knows where it is even if they don't know it's there, because it's on the ground floor of Gleeson, it's hard to miss.

Here, Dr. Fiore underscored how the gallery's enmeshment in a cosmopolitan location allows for spontaneous and organic encounters. Considering the gallery's location in the library and explaining how it informed her principal encounter with the gallery, Dr. Friedman shared:

I experienced Thacher Gallery, not knowing that it was there, but because it is sort of a corridor. You know, the way it's set up? So, I'm pretty sure I first encountered it by walking into the back to find the room with the copiers in it.

In this case, Dr. Friedman became aware of the gallery due to the serendipitous location of the gallery in the midst of the library grounds. Reinforcing Dr. Friedman's experience of the gallery's location, and how its orientation informed her awareness, Dr. Meredith commented:

I just noticed it in passing, I mean I think it's in a pretty good location in terms of just encountering it as you're going about other library business. I remember walking through and being like "I didn't even know this was here like what is this" in my first or second year at USF... I felt like I kind of discovered it on my own.

In both cases, Dr. Friedman and Dr. Meredith indicated how their exposure to the gallery occurred in the midst of visiting the library for either leisure or work-related purposes. Here, it is interesting to note that the gallery came into professor's awareness while educators were engaging the library as an educational resource. As these two reflections suggest, in visiting the library academics can inadvertently become visitors to the gallery and potentially use the gallery as a resource for their class. Affirming these experiences, Dr. Hongisto described the gallery in a similar fashion. He commented:

The location, well of course it's in a centralized part of the campus. It's in the heart of the campus in the library, which says a lot about where academics are. It's not over in the Student Center which sometimes most galleries are, or it's not in an art-central space, like an art building.... It's in a public space where the students will be.

Dr. Hongisto's comment highlighted how the gallery is interwoven in a communal setting which provides additional context to Dr. Meredith and Dr. Friedman's experiences as the larger environment the gallery is built into is already being utilized as an educational resource.

In summary, from a logistical point of view, the gallery was applicable to participants given its central location at the university. Reflecting on their first-impressions of the gallery, participants often picked up on how the space was unconventionally placed in the library and that it appeared as a "passageway". In terms of proximity, participants perceived the gallery as an accessible space where educators could easily incorporate sensory experiences into their classes. In other instances, participants revealed how the gallery's position within the library building gave rise to their initial awareness of the gallery. Synthesizing these two considerations, the gallery was primarily perceived as an interspatial environment where the academic community



perambulated as they visited the library. As findings suggest, the gallery's location sparked participant's awareness of Thacher Gallery's which later evolved into these same participants incorporating the gallery in their own teaching.

### **The Gallery's Social Level**

After considering the gallery's spatial qualities, participants thereafter came to apprehend the gallery's communal properties. Across multiple interviews, participants shed light on the ways they came into awareness of the gallery. Understanding Thacher as a co-curricular environment accessible to multiple audiences, participants frequently tied their awareness of the gallery in terms of its inclusivity. In these conversations, it was made clear that beyond the gallery's educational or aesthetic applications that the space served a social function as an environment that animated and brought people together. It is from these repeated comments of the gallery communal qualities which framed the gallery as a cosmopolitan space on campus. Noting the way in which the gallery interacts with participants at an individual level in addition to the wider community, this thematic area examines the gallery in terms of its social elements. Particularly, the gallery's capacity to stir conversation and contemplation in exhibitions which serve to facilitate unique opportunities that beckon university affiliates in all roles to engage in meaningful discourse.

During the interview, participants reflected on conversations they had with their colleagues in response to the gallery. In doing so, data provided insight into the general perception academics had concerning the gallery's programing. Parsing out the differences as to how academics resonated with the gallery in terms of their backgrounds, Dr. Hongisto shared:

I've always had interesting conversations about what's coming up in the gallery... the art historians tend to be more focused on how they're going to analyze it cross culturally or through all the mechanisms of how art history works...whereas I think with the Fine Arts

faculty it's always about the objects...those kind of conversations are more material based yeah but they both come back to the subject matter in an indirect way so the conversations we've had about the gallery depends on the person's background.

Here, it is interesting to note that the arts are stimulating to individuals in a variety of ways.

Thinking back to previous instances in which faculty describe the gallery as a multimodal space, it is evident that the dynamic of the gallery allowed for audience members (including academics) to interact. Sometimes this materialized pedagogically through a class visit, while at other times it arised passively as professors engaged as audience members who quietly appreciated the aesthetics of the gallery. Acknowledging the gallery's continual curation of exhibitions and its role in the community, Dr. Fiore remarked:

Every few months...there's a new exhibit and that's always kind of great. You can have to see what's going on just you know just in terms of the vitality. Whether it's student work or or just kind of local work there are all things I wouldn't be aware of right and you just kind of take a moment of your day to dwell on it.

It was in this frame that participants gave evidence as to how the gallery operated as a space of inquiry. In these cases, it was the topical elements revolving in the gallery which spurred reflection in audience members allowing educators at certain times to immerse themselves in the gallery as audience members.

Examining the dynamics that arise in visits to Thacher Gallery, Dr. Hongisto described the gallery's communal elements. For example, examining the interactions that arose in the library, he remarked:

Thacher Gallery has been a social lubricant. for which is that the educational hierarchies can be blended...that to me is an amazing thing that doesn't usually happen...Thacher Gallery is an open public experience and it breaks down the normal barriers

Identifying the way in which individuals from a wide-range of roles at the university have engaged with the gallery, Dr. Hongisto articulated his personal sense of the gallery as a public

atmosphere. In his view, the exhibitions effectively provided the college community with opportunities for individuals of all roles to converge. This quality to congregate diverse audiences, according to Dr. Hongisto, was notable as he had not seen them as easily accomplished in other campus spaces. Reinforcing the view of the gallery as a cosmopolitan space of multiplicity in terms of its wide-ranging topics and its pull on diverse audiences, the same professor reflected on the gallery in terms of its dialogue. Talking about this role in the gallery, Dr. Hongisto commented:

When you put it into the context of the gallery it's you know it's fascinating because there's this venue for which we have a conversation about the beauty of the world through objects or experiences which is different than music or performing arts...when the concerts over you don't really go "let's go talk about you know that band" but in the arts, you might have a discussion, months later, saying "you know we should do another environmental art show" those kind of ideas.

According to Dr. Hongisto, the gallery functioned as an environment that could simulate conversation among university affiliates which not only transpired in the spur-of-the-moment but often continued well after the exhibition's closure.

Reflecting on the gallery's programming and comparing it with similar spaces on college campuses (both at USF and beyond), participants viewed the gallery as a social atmosphere. The gallery's engagement with the academic community was made clear when some participants talked about their first encounters with the gallery. For example, Dr. Friedman described their first encounter with the gallery as follows:

One of the first exhibits that I really paid close attention to was, I believe it's their yearly gallery show of the professors and instructors' work....there was a sense of oh there's an art gallery on campus that honors the work of campus artists.

Dr. Friedman's observation of the gallery celebrating the artistic prowess of campus affiliates helped expand the function of exhibitions presented by the gallery beyond student engagement,

as they only supported educator's in their individual class instruction but also functioned as a place that appreciated the collective academic community. Speaking to the gallery's welcoming qualities in comparison to other places, Dr. Friore expressed:

I've been to a few different places and I think thacher is by far the most accessible of all of them....the most welcoming and the most open.

Dr. Fiore's observations pertaining to the gallery's openness reinforced the perception other participants had towards the gallery as a collective environment. For instance, considering the gallery as being interconnected with the larger institution, Professor Dowling remarked:

So the gallery...it's really quite a radical space and it brings all sorts of people together...I think it reflects the environment that it's embedded in.

In this case, Professor Dowling saw the gallery as an exemplary campus space that invites diverse members of the academic community. Considering the descriptions by these three professors in response to the gallery's openness, the data showcased some examples as to how the gallery may engage with the academic community beyond the sphere of instruction as indicated in previous sections. As some professors underscored, in certain instances, the gallery shined as a place of congregation that both welcomed and celebrated members of the university.

In summary, these reflections shed light on the resonance the gallery has upon the academic community. Identifying the range of programming which beckoned the interest of academics and administrators alike, it became clear that the gallery operates as a communal hub that welcomes individuals from all areas of the university. In particular cases, the gallery was perceived through an administrative scope, in which the gallery was understood as a place that promoted the arts among university constituents. In other cases, the gallery's close ties were highlighted, in which intellectual connections between gallery staff and academic departments were acknowledged. Ultimately, participants outlined how the gallery connects with the

academic community most notably through its ability to encourage scholarly exchanges between university affiliates. In so doing, participants contextualized the gallery as a pivotal environment that was actively involved in the social fabric at the university through dialogue and assembly.



**CHAPTER FIVE:  
DISCUSSION &  
CONCLUSION**



## OVERVIEW

Informed by constructivist grounded theory, this qualitative study interviewed five professors to arrive at a collective understanding of the Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery. Paying respect to each participant's experience, the researcher aimed to “[construct a] theory as an outcome of the participant’s stories” while also “[striving] to maintain the participants’ presence” throughout the writing process (Mills, 2016, p. 32). Staying close to participants' interpretations allowed the researcher to arrive at a holistic exposition of the gallery. Honoring the intersubjectivity of participants alongside first-person perspectives, this study was also informed by critical phenomenology (Salamon, 2018). Synthesizing both frameworks, the researcher elicited findings based on each participant's lived experiences to examine the role university galleries hold at post-secondary institutions (Jonah & Hill, 2003). Resultantly, four themes of the gallery arose in terms of its pedagogical, aesthetic, spatial, and social dimensions.

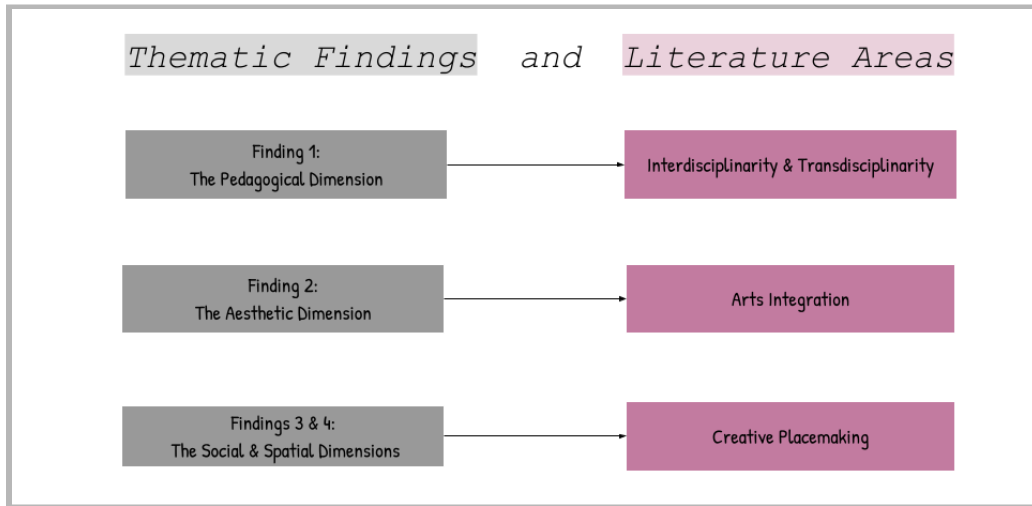
## DISCUSSION

Referencing research outlined in the literature review, the following sections examine the findings identified in the previous chapter. In varying degrees, each thematic area builds upon the project's underlying theoretical framework of place consciousness in addition to an area of academic literature. Surrounding the *pedagogical dimension*, participants' responses of the gallery’s educational applications echoed the views raised in research related to interdisciplinarity. In terms of the *aesthetic dimension*, participants’ interpretations of the gallery's artistic elements overlapped with established literature in the field of arts integration. Jointly assessing the gallery’s *social and spatial dimensions*, the third section connects these findings with academic literature concerning creative placemaking. Across the sections that

follow, this project's findings are contextualized in a broader arena of research which serve to inform the thesis' implications and conclusions. This structure is visualized below:

**Figure 5:**

*Thematic Findings and Literature Areas*



*Note:* graphic demonstrating the relationship between thematic analysis and the areas of research

### **The Gallery's Pedagogical Dimension**

Bridging findings with established research, it became clear that participants' educational use of the gallery exemplified interdisciplinarity models of teaching. This study differed from previous student-centered research that examined the educational role of co-curricular spaces stationed in post secondary institutions (Alagona & Simon, 2010). Primarily collecting the experience of professors, my findings suggest that art galleries in postsecondary settings may have educational applications by supporting instructors in accomplishing their curricular goals. Considering the academic diversity of participants, the data also exhibited the gallery's capacity to engage multiple subject areas. This study extended established concepts of place consciousness, a theoretical framework that encourages the fusion of traditional and non-traditional learning environments, by exhibiting a case in which galleries acted as 'informal'



spaces that intermixed with students' formal instruction (Grunewald, 2003; Philips, 2010). As will be examined below, participants collectively interpreted the gallery's pedagogical function most clearly when the gallery engaged professors as a classroom partner.

Participants provided two reasons for visiting the gallery with their classes. Some professors valued gallery visits as a deviation from regular class structure while other professors valued the conceptual intersections between class themes and exhibition topics. In both cases, professors understood their visit as a way to support their teaching goals. As researchers note, integrating place-based pedagogies in curriculum expands traditional 'compartmentalized' learning dynamics by welcoming an intermixing of formal and informal sites of instruction in teaching (Herman, 2017; Kelly & Sharon, 2019). Scholars also underscore the significance of integrating cross-disciplinary activities—in the form of co-curricular environments—amidst students learning outside the bounds of their typical classroom environments. (Besty, 2008; Budwig & Alexander, 2020). Building upon these perspectives, my findings suggest that professors who involved their classes with the gallery may have engaged in a synthesis that exemplified interdisciplinary practices. Interpreting the gallery as a classroom partner may be an example of Barry et al. (2008)'s examination of the subordination-service model of interdisciplinarity, a scholarly dynamic where the knowledge of other disciplines are harnessed to advance the concepts of a singular discipline. Whether in the area of politics, rhetoric, music, dance or painting, the gallery was operationalized to support student's comprehension of a course. These observations, to a limited degree, showcased the gallery's commitment to work with instructors to facilitate learning experiences that resonate with educators.

Although participants underscored the gallery's role as a classroom partner across multiple subject-areas, professors did not significantly acknowledge any transdisciplinary

elements. Discussing the gallery's commitment in presenting exhibitions tied to themes concerning social justice, professors were appreciative of this as they understood how these themes weren't always so explicit in student's instruction. However, beyond appreciating these qualities, participants didn't expand on its usefulness other than providing students with awareness of pressing contemporary issues. It was in this case, that the transdisciplinary aspects of the gallery were considered a notable but secondary interest. However, as researchers explore, postsecondary institutions are opportune environments that can equip these concepts given their role as sites of knowledge production (McGregor & Volckmann, 2013; Nicolescu, 2012). More importantly, the arts have been identified by scholars as being favorable spaces to facilitate 'integral learning' that not only supplements student's mastery of core concepts but also develops their understanding of their positionality in a globalized world (Morales, 2017; Woywood & Deal, 2016). Although the gallery was considered an established artistic space within the university, the data was unable to substantially expand on concepts surrounding transdisciplinarity raised in literature. These shortcomings may be explained by the constraint placed on professors due to their educational priorities; given participant's primary focus on their student's learning, the gallery's unpacking of broader concepts may have been interpreted at most as a peripheral quality. This considered, it may be the case that the gallery blurs borders between isolated fields of study and offers alternative educational structures, but in terms of supporting classroom instruction it seems that academics were more interested in partnering with the art gallery to deepen rather than extend their pedagogies.

In summary, participants acknowledged how engaging in the gallery resulted in deepening students' thinking of course concepts while providing educators opportunities to advance their teaching goals. Identifying these outcomes, findings concerning the gallery's

pedagogical elements aligned with academic literature surrounding interdisciplinary. As Fr. Lucas (2021) examines, cultural and creative spaces stationed within Jesuit universities can operate as interdisciplinary zones that “connect with disciplines and programs across the spectrum” (p.7). Additionally, we know that integrating the arts in college experiences can strengthen the academic success and learning of students in non-arts disciplines (Payton et al, 2017). Advancing these concepts, this study showcased a series of instances where professors integrated a co-curricular arts environment into their course, and in doing so underscored the educational outcomes of integrating arts spaces in students' learning.

### **The Gallery’s Aesthetic Dimension**

It became clear that participants' interpretation of the gallery’s artistic elements overlapped with research in the field of arts-integration. Acknowledging the gallery’s curation of visual mediums in exhibitions, instructors often described the gallery as a sensory environment that stood apart from other spaces on campus. These descriptions provided insight on the potential perception of the gallery as an *alternative* and *artistic* environment that may not otherwise exist in other academic spaces. As literature highlights, artistic environments evoke ‘peak experiences’ of introspection which may play a role in stimulating student’s processing of their own identity and positionality (Mastandrea, Fagioli & Biasi, 2019; Maslow, 1971). In addition, we recognize that arts-based learning is a documented framework that harnesses creative practices in order to support the learning of students in a wide variety of disciplines (Darts, 2004; Sharman & Morrisey, 2017; Smulyan, 2021). Examining the gallery with these viewpoints in mind, professors shed light as to how the gallery’s sensory nature may have encouraged interaction, giving rise to new class dynamics that advance student’s development. Responses which align with Tishman & Palmer (2006) research suggesting how “[the arts]

naturally invites deep and extended thought” and how “works of art provoke rich, multilayered meaning-making in ways unlike other disciplines” (p.11).

One way artistic elements were made evident to participants was in terms of the gallery’s sensibility towards students and instructors. Observing gallery staff tailor tours of exhibitions during class visits, professors felt that the gallery could be sensitive towards instructional needs which in turn presented opportunities for classes to respond to the thematic and artistic elements of the exhibition in question. As research suggests, the arts can engage postsecondary academic communities to process disciplinary knowledge in a new and often alternative perspective (Katsaros-Molzahn, 2020; Risner, Naylor & Marshall, 2019). We also know that the inclusion of creative experiences is valuable across disciplines, as doing so can benefit student’s cognitive skills in their mastery of skills and coursework (Miller, 2018). Building upon these concepts, this study showcased particular instances in higher-education where academics engaged in projects—in the form of musical and theatrical pieces— that were informed by the artistic elements of the gallery. In this case, the nature of the gallery infused aesthetics into classroom projects. This approach may be particularly critical to enhancing student learning given that research suggests the inclusion of artistic experiences welcomes 'cumulative knowledge building' that can revitalize learning methods, strengthen curricular understandings, and in certain cases support underrepresented educational populations (Katsaros-Molzahn, 2020; Lilliedehal, 2018; Marshall, 2014). Advancing this research, the findings shed light on a possible role of aesthetics by outlining key instances where arts-centered spaces were utilized by academics from disciplines outside and within the art as effective tools to engage their class.

Another way this study showcased a possible role of aesthetics was through outlining the correlation between gallery exhibitions and broader social justice concepts. Highlighting the fall

exhibition's bridging of the arts with broader principles of environmental justice, participants noted how the gallery's often operationalized the arts to advance philosophies undergirding the Jesuit university (Fr. Lucas, 2021). Post-secondary institutions are considerable places that not only educate students across multiple fields of study but also supplement students' knowledge of global issues beyond the campus (Jacob, 2014). College education not only supplies students with knowledge respective to their discipline but encourages an 'engaged citizenship' that may continue to develop well beyond students' formative educational experiences (Goralnik et al., 2012; Williams, 2016). Affirming these perspectives, the findings show us how cocurricular spaces such as university galleries may play a supplementary role in higher education by encouraging creativity and mindfulness that can advance institutional philosophies that are underlie students' Jesuit college experiences.

In summary, the aesthetic elements identified by participants corresponded with academic literature surrounding creative placemaking. As some participants highlighted, the gallery as a sensory space filled with diverse mediums and tangible objects provided opportunities for courses to be stimulated in ways that are not present in typical lecture halls or classrooms. Because of this, participants understood how the gallery's artistic qualities invited classes to engage in a different and refreshing dynamic. The findings also demonstrated that participants interpreted Thacher Gallery as an environment that stood as an *alternative space* to regular sites of instruction. While some participants shed light on the gallery as a sensory place that offers students with tangible objects and visual stimuli, others took note of the ways the arts harnessed broader topics that may be more difficult to unpack outside a visual medium. As researchers have highlighted, the arts operate well beyond their visual nature, engaging in a dialogical manner in educational settings by facilitating conversations and empowering students in terms of

their own lived experiences (Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006). We also know that the arts play a crucial role in reinforcing critical and creative thinking skills in students in various disciplines (Moderez & Ceulemans, 2018). Taking these perspectives into consideration, the data highlighted how the gallery established itself as a co-curricular space for examining topics which concern individuals as global citizens and members of the academic community. Nonetheless, the gallery's aesthetic elements were often understood in terms of its alternativity in which the space offered an 'added dimension' to students' learning experiences. Recognizing these perspectives, it may be that in interlacing diverse artistic mediums (i.e., three-dimensional sculptures, photographs, paintings, videos), the gallery may first appear to function as a stimulating atmosphere that captures or piques interest of the academic community.

### **The Gallery's Social-Spatial Dimension**

The gallery's spatial and social elements were often discussed in conjunction by interviewees. Surprisingly, it became evident that the gallery's social perception was informed by its configuration in the library. Resultantly, the spatial qualities became an underlying factor in participants' understanding of the gallery's sociability with the academic community. Curating programs that prompt contemplation for the academic community, we know that academic galleries and museums are 'interstitial' campus environments that curate programs that operate concurrently in pedagogical and public ways (Mayer, 2003; Murphy, 2018, Star & Friesemer, 1989). Interpreting the gallery in this manner may explain how participants made sense of the gallery as an educational yet cosmopolitan environment that offers spaces for people to ponder and reflect. Synthesizing these two thematic areas, my findings highlighted how the gallery's ubiquitous location facilitates opportunities for academics, students and other university affiliates to engage with one another.

In certain cases, some participants took interest in the gallery's curation of programs that celebrated the artistic talents of the academic community, and saw this as a complement to the galler's established location within the university library. As underscored by researchers, physical spaces may be understood as containers of social relationships that reflect the diversity of the immediate environments they are situated in (Costello, 2014). In terms of scholarship, we know that informal spaces which stand apart from typical sites of instruction—when utilized thoughtfully—can bolster connections amongst students and scholars (Smith, 2002). Similarly, researchers recognize the role of creative environments, as being incubators that may help deepen the salience or sense-of-belonging individuals have with their community (McCormick et al., 2020). As Turner (2016) remarks, “centering cultural practices in the community...increases folks' ability to live and work together by amplifying their voice and ownership, and by helping them see themselves, their concerns, and their dreams reflected in the process of making their community stronger” (p.14). These perspectives provide insight as to how the gallery's location within a pre-established academic context may inform faculty's understanding of its potential functions as an asset to the academic community. Additionally, these perspectives demonstrate that the gallery is not only recognized by professors as a classroom partner, but as a collective place that celebrates university affiliates and encourages social cohesion of members across the academic community (i.e., administrators, professors, students).

Describing the gallery as an accessible space, professors underscored the correlation between the gallery's location and its educational applications. In terms of its spatial qualities, the gallery resonated to academics as an intermediary location on campus that diverged from typical instructional settings. Picking up on this interstitial position amidst the university, the findings emphasized how the gallery resonates as an accessible space to academics across

numerous departments. As researchers in the field of creative placemaking and place-based pedagogy suggest, incorporating communal environments into formal educational settings, can minimize gaps between disciplines in addition to extending pedagogy to the lived experiences of educators and students (Cuff & Wolch, 2016; Grunewald, 2003). We also know that experiential education can reframe classroom dynamics by inviting social and spatial elements beyond the immediate instructional environment, which serve to heighten student's understanding of their positionality within institutional and community contexts (Marissa, 2020; Elmgren, 2020). Encouraging scholars to immerse themselves or their teaching in nontraditional spaces, researchers recognize how these practices constructively expand where students can and should be learning (Stevenson, 2008). Building upon these concepts, my findings confirm the outcomes of centering scholarship in social and informal spaces; particularly, how non-traditional places of study such as university galleries may encourage academics to embrace new pedagogies and welcome new ways of understanding in their teaching. In this view, the gallery's co-curricular position on campus presented professors and their students with an opportunity to expand their education by venturing beyond the classroom environment and in certain cases entertain fresh concepts curated in art exhibitions.

Beyond the principal exhibition in question, participants referenced additional instances in which the gallery engaged the academic community, these being the *Faculty Triennial*<sup>10</sup> and The *Art + Architecture Annual*<sup>11</sup> programs. In both circumstances, participants paid attention to how the gallery thoughtfully showcased the artistic work of academic faculty and rising students at the university. As researchers underscore, creative placemaking provides organizations and institutions with an understanding of how artistic practices or environments can animate

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<sup>10</sup>For more information on these triennials, reference <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery/studio-visit>

<sup>11</sup>For more information, reference <https://www.usfca.edu/thacher-gallery/the-light-is-still-on>



communities (Cuff & Wolch, 2016; Emelgren, 2016; Wali et al., 2002). Additionally, we know the arts can function well beyond their aesthetic means, as they stimulate social practices that encourage dialogue amongst affinity groups which in certain cases may lead towards community solidarity (Morrisey, 2017; Wright, Down & Davis, 2020). Extending these perspectives, this study showcased ways in which creative placemaking may manifest on college campuses. In terms of affinity groups, participants observed the gallery not only celebrate arts writ-large but intentionally curate programs paying homage to artists within the academic community. Advancing the arts in this fashion, my findings suggest the influence the gallery may have in terms of animating the community; specifically, by curating programs which peaks the interest of professors and in certain cases encourages them to engage in dialogue with their colleagues.

In summary, the data underscored the gallery's as an open campus space that welcomed individual contemplation in addition to presenting opportunities for university affiliates from all departments to congregate. As researchers in the field of creative placemaking underscore, the arts provides communities with opportunities to express their relationship with the environments they work, live, and learn (Clarke, 2020; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Webb, 2014) Considering creative placemaking as a theory that views the arts as a promising tool to inspire and inform institutions, this study's findings built upon this concept, by highlighting the synchronous physical and social role campus arts play in post-secondary institutions. Acknowledging the concurrent functions of the gallery, participants understood the gallery as a centralized campus space that supports the scholarship of students and professors while also a social environment that presents creative programs that bring diverse university affiliates together.

## IMPLICATIONS

This project would benefit from additional research in similar settings to provide a more nuanced understanding of the gallery's role in private liberal arts colleges. In addition to these findings, three recommendations arose in discussion: (1) deepening the gallery's interdisciplinary programming by partnering with disciplines that are typically underrepresented in the arts, (2) reinforcing the connections between the library staff and the gallery, and (3) to consider the curricular preferences of academics.

Towards the end of the interview participants reflected on future programs they would like to see at the gallery. In many cases, academics were interested in the interdisciplinary capacities of the gallery, hoping to see more engagement with academic departments outside the humanities or arts. Desiring the gallery to broaden its engagement with disciplines reflected two things: (1) that participants recognize the gallery's ability to partner with academics, and (2) that participants believe that more complex and far-reaching partnerships could occur at the gallery. Suggestions as these reinforce academic researchers that advocate for the integration of the arts in dissimilar fields of study (i.e., science, technology, engineering and math otherwise known as STEM) as they promote a *curricular flexibility* that can effectively blur subject boundaries and broaden learning opportunities for students (Burnard et al., 2020; Payton et al., 2020).

The gallery should also consider how to be more strategic in its pre-established location at the library. One of the interviewees, Dr. Friedman, who had never used the space as a curricular device, mentioned the role her library liaison played in realizing Thacher as a resource. Dr. Meredith was an example of how faculty may become aware of the gallery, in which professors may serendipitously come across the space given its pre-established location in the library. It is in this sense that deepening bonds between curators and librarians could be a

strategy in making the gallery more visible to academics. From these comments, it was made clear that the gallery's rapport with library staff may help in making the academic community more aware of Thacher as an educational resource.

Lastly, participants offered context of how their knowledge of the exhibitions being presented by the gallery tended to align with their own curriculum planning. In these instances, educators considered two things. One, the timing of students developing knowledge of course content and their comfortability pivoting to an environment beyond the classroom to unpack educational concepts. Secondly, some faculty were candid about their capacities as educators when speaking about their planning timeline as educators. In these conversations, it was made that visits to the gallery were most feasible in the fall as they were designing their curriculum. These insights reveal one way professors design and plan curriculum, considering their students' developing understanding in course material and how long the exhibition in question stays "up". Ultimately, the consensus was clear across participants that the fall exhibition was timely in terms of course instruction. These answers shed light on the window of time during the academic year that collaboration between academics and gallery staff may arise.

In summary, showcasing a handful of examples, this project encourages university professors from diverse disciplines to consider utilizing on-campus co-curricular environments. Examining a specific dynamic between educators at a medium-sized private Jesuit university, the conclusions of this project are most resonant to smaller liberal arts colleges. However, with more research into the dynamics between galleries and instructors, it is safe to infer that other creative co-curricular campus spaces have the ability to advance the university's commitment towards scholarship and social justice. As Stevenson (2008) underscores, place-based pedagogies constructively interrogates scholarship and critically considers the role of learning environments.

Embracing these concepts, university galleries may be considered artistic and communal places that expand students' learning and development.

## CONCLUSION

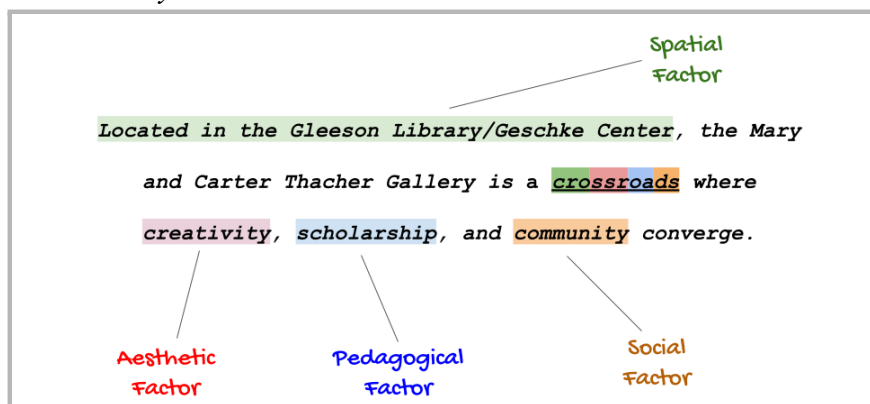
The study identified four related to the functions of art galleries stationed within post-secondary institutions. The first result of this study was that the gallery could function as a classroom partner to educators, exemplifying principles of interdisciplinary in the process. Examining the aesthetic elements underlying exhibits, the second findings recognized the gallery as a sensory environment that could spur creativity in audiences whilst operationalizing the arts to promote contemplation on broader social justice principles underlying Jesuit scholarship. Taking these conceptual and creative qualities together, it became clear to participants that the gallery could be an intermediary space where exhibitions compelling to multiple disciplines could arise. As scholars suggest, integrating creative practices at educational institutions bridges different fields of study in order to facilitate “cultures of creativity” that lead towards “the creation of an unorthodox curricular architecture dedicated to imaginative thinking” (Steger, 2019, p.768). Although research typically notes interdisciplinary practices and arts integration separately, this study framed galleries as places that synthesize these principles by encouraging inquiry and engaging the senses. In terms of the third and fourth finding, participants concurrently recognized the gallery’s complementary *social-spatial* qualities. In these cases, participants saw the gallery’s central campus location as playing a significant factor in effectively bringing people from the academic community together under the same exhibition space. As research suggests, museums and galleries straddle different roles, acting as communal environments and spaces of inquiry. (Illeris, 2015; Lee & Northcott; Star & Griesemer, 1989; Xanthoudaki, 1998). We also know that educational approaches welcoming the arts can facilitate

opportunities for interlinked scholarship that converges numerous ways-of-processing (Goldman et al., 2016; Lilliedahl, 2018), a mode of scholarship which is rising in importance in an interdependent and globalized world (Budwig & Alexander, 2020; Stevenson, 2008). These points considered, the study expanded upon literature by showcasing university galleries as ‘dwelling spaces’ that are utilized by academics, students, and administrators alike.

Ultimately, this study examined the role of creative environments in university settings and in doing so presented the gallery as a campus space that engages the academic community in multiple ways. Building upon the gallery’s defining quality as a co-curricular environment, participants conceptualized the gallery as: (1) a pedagogical place serving the needs of educators across a range of disciplines, (2) an aesthetic environment that harnesses the arts to present audiences with an engaging sensory environment, and (3) an accessible social-spatial campus space, that invites academic community from all roles to dwell in a communal and contemplative environment. Outlining these findings, it is evident that participants collectively reinforced the titular descriptions set in place by the gallery as visualized below.

**Figure 6:**

*Annotated Thacher Gallery Mission Statement*



*Note.* This graphic demonstrates how the study’s findings aligned with the official mission statement of the Thacher Gallery. The emphasis on the word *crossroads* in all four colors (red, blue, orange, and green) reinforces the gallery’s four simultaneous roles.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Question 1: I'd like to hear briefly about what brought you to your research interests and how you ended up at USF?

Question 2: Think back to the first time you encountered the Thacher Gallery. What were the particular circumstances that brought you to the Gallery for the first time? What were your impressions?

Question 2A: Outside this particular experience, in what other ways have you engaged with the Thacher gallery?

Question 2B: Regarding these experiences, what is your sense of the University of San Francisco faculty's overall awareness and interactions with the Thacher Gallery?

Question 2C: Can you tell me about a time when any of your colleagues shared their experience or impression of the Thacher Gallery with you? What did they say? How was it similar or different from yours?

Question 3: Thinking back to the Fall of 2021, what was the reasoning behind incorporating a visit to Thacher Gallery in your class last semester? (mention their particular course).

Question 3A: Did you plan this particular session differently in comparison to your regular classes?

Question 3B: in what ways, if any, did you utilize the artistic/creative elements of the exhibition for your class?

Question 3C: During the visit to the gallery, in what ways did you observe your class engage with the art displayed in the gallery? What, if any, impressions did you hear from your students?.

Question 3D: Were you surprised by any of the ways students engaged with the gallery? If so, can you recall any examples?

Question 3E: What, if anything, didn't go that well with the gallery visit?

Question 3F: Beyond this particular visit, were there any ways in which the gallery visit was utilized/recalled in your course?

Question 4: Considering your personal experiences with Thacher Gallery, has your understanding of university galleries changed?

Question 4A: In your opinion, how is the Thacher Gallery different from other academic spaces on campus?

Question 4B: What works well about the physical location of the Thacher Gallery in terms of being a classroom partner?

Question 4C: What, if anything, could be changed about the physical location of the Thacher Gallery that would make it a more accessible classroom partner?

Question 4D: If you've worked at other universities, what is your sense of how the university gallery interacted with the academic community? Were there similarities or differences to the Thacher Gallery and USF?

Question 5: Thinking of ways in which the gallery can reinforce classroom instruction, what types of programming would you hope to see in the future at the Thacher Gallery?

Question 6: Are there any other aspects of the gallery that you would like to discuss?

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled “The Gallery As A Site Of Convergence: The Role Of Creative Environments At Postsecondary Institutions ” conducted by Jordán Sandoval (He/Him) a Masters student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. This faculty supervisor for this study is Professor Seenae Chong, a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco.

#### **WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:**

The purpose of this project is to illuminate how the gallery engages with the academic community at the University of San Francisco. In addition, this project also aims to highlight the ways in which University Galleries among other co-curricular and/or cultural spaces can contribute towards scholarship and student development at similar post secondary institutions. Focusing on the exhibitions curated by the Thacher Gallery during the 2020-2021 academic school year, this work aims to arrive at a collective understanding of Thacher Gallery on behalf of a diverse pool of professors at USF who've engaged with the gallery during this time.

#### **WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:**

During this study, the following will happen: The principal investigator (Jordán Sandoval) will ask you a series of questions. With your permission, he will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, he will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, we can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

#### **DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation in this study will involve a virtual interview over Zoom which will take 45-60 minutes. If needed, there may be opportunities for follow-up interviews. This study will take place virtually.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:**

The risks and benefits associated with this study are a loss of your time and the risks associated with regular activities. The benefit of the study is that it may add to the research on the field of education and international/multicultural issues. This information, once collected, might be read by policymakers, educational experts, educators and scholars and could affect the educational practice. If you do not want to participate in the study, you will not be mentioned in any documents of the study, and your decision to not participate will not be told to anyone. You may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty. If you are upset by any of the questions asked, the researcher will refer you to counseling services available publicly or at the university if you are a member of the academic community (student, staff or professor).

**BENEFITS:**

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include. By agreeing to be part of this project, you would support a project that seeks to explore how the Thatcher Gallery—alongside university galleries in general— are valuable spaces that can deepen class engagement and enhance student learning. And, from such conclusions, not only underscore the pivotal role they play on college campuses but also shed light on suggestions that can improve their engagement.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, real names will be replaced by pseudonyms on all interview and observation transcripts, and all audio files, observation notes, or other documents that contain personal identifiers will be stored in a password-protected computer or hard-drive that we will keep in a locked file cabinet until the research has been completed. Original audio-files will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts in a locked file cabinet. Consent forms and any other identifiable data will be destroyed in 3 years from the date of data collection.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Jordan Sandoval at 650-670-2927 or [jfsandoval@dons.usfca.edu](mailto:jfsandoval@dons.usfca.edu) or the faculty supervisor, Seenae Chong at (408) 421-2085 or [srchong@usfca.edu](mailto:srchong@usfca.edu). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu).

**I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

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*PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE*

*DATE*