

## **A Service-Learning Project: Linking an Art Museum, Honors Students, and the Visual Arts**

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the structure, challenges, and outcomes of a service-learning project experimented by an art historian in an innovative special topics course Museum Experience, cross-listed with an Honors art appreciation course.

The discussion includes: creating a new course content planned according to a multidisciplinary perspective uniting elements of art appreciation, museum studies and art history research methodologies; planning a mutual dialogue of theory and practice by structuring a partnership with the art museum and graphic design in a service-learning project, consisting in both essay and layout of an exhibition catalogue.

The syllabus structure is fully explained, as well as timeline challenges and how they have been won by enhancing the design component of the project. Finally, the students' reception of the course activities, timeline challenges, and innovations through qualitative data coming from an end-of-Semester questionnaire will be discussed as well.

**Keywords:** Service-learning, Lynn Thorpe, art appreciation, museum experience, exhibition catalogue.

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Academic efforts towards creating first-year courses, with a diversified set of assignments “that are designed to build conceptual and applied skills” is not new in the arts and sciences, as a sociology study reveals (Steuter & Doyle, 2010, p.66). However, an art history faculty serving as a generalist in a visual arts department faces the challenge to design ways to foster the diverse creative approaches of fine arts, art education and graphic design students within an academic discipline. In its traditional modernist structure, art history reflects a “‘transmission’ model of communication,” which involves “a linear process of information-transfer from an authoritative source to an uninformed receiver,” where “knowledge is seen as objective” and the message as “received more or less efficiently, and in the same way by all” (Hooper-Grenhill, 2001, p.15). This authoritative, content-oriented art historical discipline seems to struggle against attributes of creativity more familiar to art students, such as “originality,” “persistence,” “independence,” “searching for alternatives” (Gomez, 2007, pp.36-38). Indeed, visual art students are used to learning through class discussions and critiques: “In the arts the method of critiquing

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student work is more democratic than most other learning situations. Usually a student presents work as if in a private showing to a group for discussion. The students will then offer suggestions and other commentary, as part of the critique” (Aievoli, 2003, p.91). The approach in the class art critiques reflects a postmodern “cultural approach” (Hooper-Grenhill, 2001, p.20), a model that “understands communication as a set of negotiated processes of making meaning as part of the complex and unequal culture of everyday life. It accepts that there are many, sometimes conflicting, perspectives from which to explain the world” (Hooper-Grenhill, 2001, p.22). How can this open and much more student-centered method be accommodated by the structural rigidity of content-based academic learning, which is required by the art historical discipline?

The course that allows the greatest amount of interaction between theories and practices is art appreciation: taught by both art faculty and generalist art historians, it may assume hybrid forms to a certain extent. There are a few published examples of courses involving the integration of theory with experiential learning components, such as through hands-on activities and field trips to art museum and campus galleries (Register, Bullington & Thomas, 2007; Innella 2010).

In spring 2011, the Visual Arts Department at South Dakota State University cross-listed lower-division Honors students of art appreciation with advanced visual arts students who were choosing a new special topics course *Museum Experience* as an elective. The proven suitability of art appreciation for pushing the boundaries between theory and practice was coupled with the exploration of a discipline outside the Department’s regular offering, namely the field of museum studies. In partnership with the Art Museum, the art historian articulated a service-learning project, consisting in having students write and design an exhibition catalogue on a local artist scheduled for exhibition in late spring. Acting as the Project Director, the course instructor applied for and was awarded a mini-grant by the Teaching Learning Center, towards covering the publication costs. This service-learning activity would fit the mission of the art museum, along with the goals of the course.

A dialogue between the course instructor and the museum curator produced the idea of assigning the class a solo exhibition, whose unified vision would become relatively easier than a collective exhibition. Artist Lynn Thorpe was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, her exhibition was scheduled at the Art Museum for April: this would give the class more than two thirds of the Semester to mature in both those theoretical and applicative skills necessary to successfully complete the task of writing and designing the catalogue. Secondly, the formal qualities of her art, which looks representational, but is actually an abstraction in disguise, would provide a great opportunity for exploring visual and conceptual complexities. Finally, but very importantly, this artist was scheduled as part of a series promoting the artistic talent within our State, and therefore would fulfill the Art Museum’s mission.

## **Service-Learning as a Cohesive Class Factor and as Partnership with the Art Museum**

Was the envisioned project adequate to the particular composition of the class?

A very recent study at the Widener University in Pennsylvania reveals that when offering a service-learning opportunity to both Honors and non-Honors sections, students “acquire competence and leadership skills, and increase their desire to make a difference through participation in short-term service projects by the end of the term, regardless of whether they were in the Honors or non-Honors course” (Simons, Williams & Russell, 2011, pp. 6, 13, and 15). This finding substantiates that a cross-listed experiment can be beneficial to both groups: on one side, lower-division Honors students are part of a community that intrinsically emphasizes leadership; on the other side, advanced graphic design students experience leadership through the competitive professional environment in which they operate. Additionally, Honors students are endowed with precocious scholarly competence and a fresh open mind, while advanced visual arts students possess highly trained visual skills and some basic knowledge of art historical content accumulated in previous survey courses. At least at a theoretical level, there seemed to be all the ingredients for a complex and multi-faceted project involving both scholarship and practice.

“Service-learning enhances a “traditional learning” course by allowing students the opportunity to link theory with practice, apply classroom learning to real-life situations, and provide students with a deeper understanding of course content” (Ballard & Elmore, 2009, p.70). The service-learning project needs to be deeply integrated into the course structure. First, the course instructor needs to identify a potential community partner, which in this case has become the Art Museum. Then, the instructor needs to locate a project within the mission of the chosen institution that can reach the academic level of students and the course goals, thus becoming an application of what learnt in class.

When planning a service-learning project, the course instructor encounters the challenge to strike a good balance between innovation and structure. On one side, “Service-learning wants to roam free across disciplines, across institutions, across society. It wants to change and transform any and all obstacles in its path. It wants freedom” (Butin, 2006, p. 491). On the other side, “Higher education is a disciplining mechanism, in all senses of the term. And that is a good thing. For to be disciplined is to carefully, systematically, and in a sustained fashion investigate whatever one is interested in doing” (Butin, 2006, 491). The instructor of this course decided to incorporate some elements of art appreciation, examples of art history investigative methodologies, selected content from museum studies, and team layout practices in the graphic design area.

A partnership between an academic course and an art museum presents a number of challenges. The first is the museum’s exhibition schedule, which does not necessarily match the academic rhythms of the semester. If the exhibition is already mounted when the semester starts, students will not be able to follow all the planning stages leading to their exhibition catalogue. If the exhibition starts after the semester is over, students will not be able to view the results of what they have been working on. A partnership opportunity

may present once as the product of fortuitous circumstances; otherwise, it may take much longer to combine a regular offering of a new course and a museum exhibition schedule which is planned years in advance. The second major challenge is the exhibition typology. Group exhibitions, especially if composed of pieces coming from 20-30 artists, present innumerable artistic and historical influences. It would be too challenging for the faculty to assign such disproportionate task to students with modest to no competence in art history content and methodologies, and at the same time to structure the diversified outcomes into a unified vision, as necessary for an exhibition catalogue. Instead, a solo exhibition provides a much more promising scenario, namely the possibility to break the project into smaller units (such as individual paintings, or artistic influences), and assign each of them to individuals or groups within the class.

There is an additional advantage in choosing a solo exhibition on a living contemporary local or regional artist: the fact that the artist chosen may obviously not have yet accumulated a significant record of secondary sources. With the artist statement as the only primary source, plus a few hints given during an initial correspondence with the artist, students are given a great amount of freedom in building up the stylistic and historical connections (Spring 2011).

### **The Service-Learning Syllabus: Course Objectives, Structure, Assessment, Activities, and Outcomes**

Further steps, during the course structuring, required the accomplishment of a wide variety of tasks, listed by Patricia L. Powell as “writing goals and objectives, defining the needs of the[ir] project’s community partner, assessing that community partner’s needs, defining potential strategies to meet those needs, designing a project timeline, estimating budget requirements, and assessing potential liability issues” (Powell, 2008, p.99).

In order to meet the goal of an exhibition catalogue, the course instructor decided to unite several components, where lectures would alternate with field trips to the museum (see Appendix). The project timeline included several activities. Their alternation throughout the semester provided a variety that kept the students’ interest alive, and allowed them to progressively mature on the various levels required by the sophistication of the service-learning activity. The instructor applied for a service-learning mini-grant to cover the publication costs for the catalogue. Liability issues were prevented by requesting the artist permission to upload images of her work in the course’s electronic reserves: students were allowed to access the images from there; a copyright note warned them to use such images exclusively to pursue the activities designed within this course. At the end of the course, the artist signed a much more detailed permission, including having her work reproduced in the catalogue; students also co-signed acceptance and publication of the essay in its edited and collaborative form.

All the planned course activities must be appropriate to the students’ level: “Students in an introductory class might need more help getting started with a service-learning project. More advanced students might benefit from experiences that are directly related to their discipline” (Ballard & Elmore, 2009, p.72). The instructor of the *Museum Experience*

course knew that some of the advanced graphic design students in the cross-listed class had already built the skills necessary to create the layout of a book. In order to allow the mini-grant to cover the publication costs, the layout project had to be a *pro bono* work, thus another form of community service. The instructor divided the two cross-listed classes into four groups, each under the leadership of an advanced graphic design student.

Each team would produce a competitive layout. This assignment was meant to simulate a real-like situation within the academic environment: advanced graphic design students would be provided with an opportunity to thrive in a competitive environment similar to those they are accustomed to; all the other students, including Honors, would have an opportunity to see some specific leadership skills in action.

When planning the syllabus, it is also necessary to create a good match between the objectives of the service-learning project and those of the course (Ballard & Elmore, 2009). Writing the essay for an exhibition catalogue and observing the parallel curatorial stages of the exhibition require a degree of familiarity with visual analysis, which is the main goal of art appreciation. For this reason, the instructor scheduled five class sessions to allow Honors students to quickly catch up with the advanced visual arts students in this area. Class discussions would allow advanced visual arts students to share their already acquired competence, and Honors students to provide their fresh insights and new perspectives.

Next, it was necessary to make the students acquainted with the major partner in the service-learning project, namely the Art Museum: its mission, the staff members and their functions, the exhibition spaces. With this purpose in mind, five days were planned either at the Art Museum, or in the company of museum staff visiting the class to give talks or demonstrations. Since the activities involving the art museum were totally unfamiliar to both groups of students, the course instructor matched them with eight basic and reader-friendly essays on museum studies, which have been lectured, summarized or assigned as home readings, each one in parallel with an activity involving the art museum and/or staff members.

At the end of January, students received a complimentary copy of the catalogue *Textural Structures*, a group exhibition that was currently on display at the Museum (co-curated by the museum curator and the course instructor), so they could connect the concept of this exhibition, as outlined in the catalogue essays, and its actual realization in the museum space. The assignment was complemented by a visit to the art museum, where the curator explained the layout of the actual exhibition, potential and limits of the display space. After that, students were assigned the task of writing an assessment paper of this show, while reading an essay addressing the various stages of development of an exhibition, including the last phase, the assessment by the visitors. In this way, students were able to connect new theoretical knowledge on a broad theme (organizing an exhibition from start to end), a more specific theoretical knowledge provided by an interdisciplinary catalogue (organically blending elements from art education, art history, art criticism) and practical aspects of an exhibition actually on display at the museum. Assigning the task to become acquainted with the variety of methodological approaches combined in the *Textural*

*Structures* catalogue would provide students with alternative resources than focused and discipline-specific art history, thus preparing them to ‘survive’ the future challenge of writing the catalogue essays for contemporary artist Lynn Thorpe.

During the eleventh week, the instructor taught elements of exhibition design, explaining the differences between integrated and segregated spaces and discussing with the class the typology of spaces in the art museum. In another class meeting, the museum curator brought in class three virtual layouts for the Lynn Thorpe exhibition; students discussed the layout options by applying basic visual elements (line, shapes and colors), learned earlier in art appreciation within one artwork, to the relationship between two or more artworks, which increased their awareness of art placed in the context of an exhibition area. One student expressed appreciation for this activity: “I enjoyed...the opportunity to give John feedback on the various layouts” (Spring, 2011).

Later on, students were welcomed by the curator of collections, who explained preservation issues by showing them the artworks in the storage areas, normally closed to the public. In the end-of-semester questionnaire, while almost all the students expressed their appreciation for the activities that occurred at the art museum, two specifically indicated the trip ‘behind-the-scenes’ with the conservator as one of the most enjoyable course activities (Spring, 2011).

In one of the last weeks, the class was visited by the Art Museum’s marketing specialist, who explained some diverse techniques she employs to reach a diverse audience (for instance, radio advertising in the evening hours, to target the mothers of children that were wanted for specific museum didactical activities). Students were assigned a parallel reading in museum studies to learn about several typologies of museum visitors, and how to address their diverse needs through differentiated marketing strategies. In the last week of class, such knowledge came forward, when students performed the guided tour of the Lynn Thorpe exhibition to a group of high school students.

A satisfactory assessment of student performance through the course needed to respect the variety of the activities planned. The grade was distributed as follows:

- A 5% for in-class discussions, which came very naturally.
- Two papers: one (15%) assessing the group exhibition that we had already in place, *Textural Structures*, and another one (25%), as individual contribution in preparation of the Lynn Thorpe catalogue.
- A small grade percentage (5%) would be an additional incentive to work towards the catalogue layout: the same grade would be awarded to all the members of the team.
- A 10% of the grade was saved for the guided tour of the Lynn Thorpe exhibition in the last week of class. Since the exhibition featured fourteen paintings by Lynn Thorpe, the week before each student chose a different painting, and became prepared to talk specifically on that one. The day of the tour, each student was positioned in front of his/her assigned painting: the instructor moved the group clock-

- wise and across, and as the group arrived in front of a painting, the student assigned to it would share content and stylistic connections.
- A 20% grade was finally assigned for both Midterm and Finals. The examinations consisted of a number of broad questions. The Midterm was differentiated, focusing on material learnt from the art appreciation discipline for the Honors students, and readings on museum studies for special topics students. The Finals was the same for everybody, and consisted on a number of questions on the most recently covered museum studies assignments: exhibition layouts, the delicate relationship between museums and contemporary artists; the conservation profession and challenges with ephemeral art; typology of museum visitors and related marketing strategies. In these two intensive-writing tests, a few students have progressively and spontaneously integrated the content of the assigned readings with the real-life situations experienced in the exhibitions *Textural Structures* and *Lynn Thorpe: Earth and Sky*, evidence of the high level of maturity achieved in connecting theory and practices.

### **From Essay to Layout: The Exhibition Catalogue as the Core of the Service-Learning Project**

The exhibition catalogue *Lynn Thorpe: Earth and Sky*, planned as service learning activity, consisted of both essay and layout.

The essay was originally envisioned by the course instructor as a big project, to be broken into smaller individual student projects of 700 to 1,000 words. The instructor asked each student to choose two to three artworks by Lynn Thorpe among the fourteen selected for the exhibition scheduled at the art museum, and apply a formal analysis to them (art appreciation). Then, each student would choose one major modern artist, and become acquainted with his/her work by reading two to three scholarly books or articles (art history). Finally, each student would compare and contrast the work of Lynn Thorpe with that of the chosen artist, looking for correspondences that would gain new insights on her work. "Because these design principles and elements themselves are abstract and difficult to conceptualize, bringing them to light is best done by concrete example." (Aievoli, 2003, p.90). That is what the instructor of the *Museum Experience* course tried to do, by providing lectures of art appreciation and then requiring students, through the service-learning project, to apply them to a real-life situation.

Instead of giving a crash-course in art history, the course instructor opted to focus one lecture on the assignment, by providing practical demonstrations on how to set up a research goal, choose another artist with intuitively perceived similarities and pursue a comparison between the two. One example made in class was Peter Claesz, whose XVIII century still-lives have an element of *vanitas* that recalls one of Thorpe's paintings. The practical demonstration included envisioning a research idea that connected the work by the two artists (for instance, a perceived sense of death), and showing students how to look through the library resources online by expanding and narrowing the key-word. In order to provide further guidance, the instructor prepared a list of readings from a number of artists and styles, ranging from Georgia O'Keeffe, to Mark Rothko, René Magritte,

Salvador Dalí, Joseph Cornell, Audrey Flack, and the American Luminists. Some students added De Chirico and Anselm Adams as their own choice (after all, high achieving students are capable of independent thinking), and decided not to pursue some other artists suggested by the instructor, if beyond their individual competence, vision, or interest.

When the instructor collected and read the short essays, she decided to group them by artists used for comparison: one on De Chirico (which was broken and used for the introduction and the conclusion, to frame the structure); four for Rothko; two on Dalí; two on Magritte; and finally, three for O’Keeffe united with one for Anselm Adams, as they worked well together. In its final form, the catalogue had four essays, plus an extensive introduction and a brief conclusion. A few Honors students, without any prior art history background, have been capable of seeing affinities between the color fields of Mark Rothko and Lynn Thorpe’s figurative work! Patrick Aievoli reflects on the fact that, when his students see an abstract work and ask him how did the artist “come up with that?,” they are trying to find something that they can recognize, “They are looking for something to hold on to, some kind of previous knowledge or reference point in their life to help them relate to what they are viewing. In essence, they are looking to relate metaphorically to the artwork.” (Aievoli, 2003, p.91) The same comparative analysis was structured so that students started with something visually relatable to them (the figurative-looking work by Lynn Thorpe); then, they would progressively move into the unfamiliar (the abstract work of Rothko); finally, by comparing the two, they would find that there are visual similarities, such as “large fields,” challenged or dissolved borders, and color variations to suggest the intangible (Bahmani, Griffin & Shay, 2011).

Even though being an assignment scholarly in nature and at basic level, the essay on Lynn Thorpe exercised the creative side of students, with particular regard for the “originality” defined by Jose G. Gomez as “the ability to produce unusual ideas, to solve problems in unusual ways, and to use things or situations in an unusual manner. Sometimes, originality is viewed as uncommonness of response, the ability to make remote or indirect connections.” (Gomez, 2007, p.36) Amanda Little and Anne Hoel (2011) suggest that, “Guiding students outside of their comfort zones in researching unfamiliar topics is part of the process” (p.43). Indeed, in the end-of-Semester questionnaire one student defined the process of looking for connections between the work of Lynn Thorpe and other artists “like a treasure hunt” (Spring, 2011).

The phase of the exhibition layout acquired more importance and demanded more time than originally anticipated. Once students were divided into teams, a class session, not initially planned in the syllabus but later felt necessary, was devoted have students initiate a discussion on the layout and take the first steps; then, students were allowed to meet independently in the following days to complete the task as homework. The layout project allowed graphic design students an opportunity to test some of their creative qualities, including “discover problems” and “generate alternatives,” (Gomez, 2007, p.38) into a complex project requiring the application of multiple elements learned in their graphic design courses. The project, at least in its initial phases, was an attempt of “collaborative learning,” which “emphasizes the interdependence of the learners and the communal nature of the process as knowledge is negotiated and co-constructed through dialogue and



problem-solving” (Cormeaux, 2010, p.63). As Karrie A. Jones and Jennifer L. Jones (2008) claim, a cooperative learning method allows student to gain crucial interpersonal and communication skills necessary in their careers, by working with team members of diverse backgrounds.

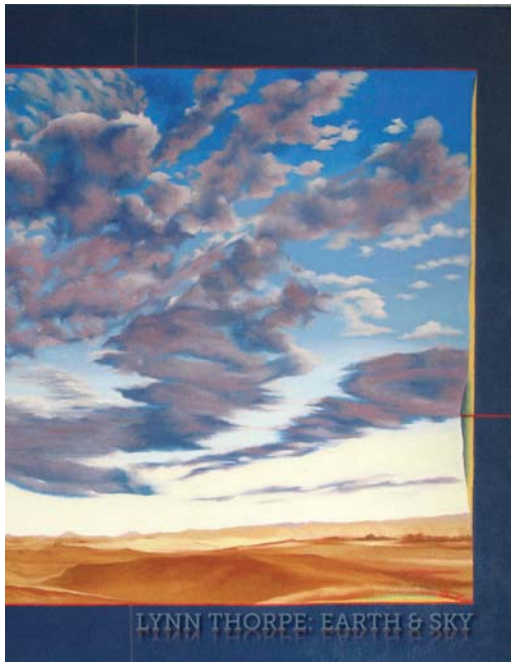
After the four layouts were completed, the instructor inserted another previously unforeseen activity: each project manager would make a presentation of his/her group layout, explaining the overall vision, the choices in terms of image, typo and color for the cover, and the challenges encountered during the creative process, while the rest of the class would be able to participate by asking questions or providing feedback, like in an art class critique. This new activity was similar to what Patricia Cormeaux (2010) has defined “Debate-Discussion Learning Project,” in which the “facilitators”, each student project manager would lead the discussion, “while the rest of the class members (along with the instructor) become participants in the discussions” (p.66). The four competitive layouts were collected by the course instructor and distributed, with the names of the layout team members removed, to three professionals in the area of museum and graphic design within our campus, who served as the jurors for the best layout to be published.

The course instructor planned the layout as a goal in itself, but did not anticipate that the layout was actually an activity that would provide an opportunity for discussion on creativity and rules. After the jurors met for a blind peer-review session of the four proposed layouts, she was informed that although exceptional in quality, the layouts could be further improved through a class critique. A sudden and necessary change in the schedule, in which unfortunately the class missed the hanging of the Lynn Thorpe exhibition, allowed an opening for two visits by the senior graphic design faculty, co-juror of the layouts, who provided in each session professional feedback on the layouts, while students were taking notes. The guest faculty correlated what has been actually done in the layouts with information that are generally covered in graphic design courses: for instance, the faculty counted how many hyphens were occurring at the end of the lines in an entire page, and asked the class how many hyphens maximum are allowed. If that page contained more than the required number, it would be necessary to have the modifications made manually in Photoshop or In Design. These two sessions became invaluable opportunities for reflection on applied graphic design. The course instructor was extremely surprised and pleased with this unexpected outcome (Figs. 1-4), as “The presence of the interdisciplinary faculty member reinforces the importance of alternative viewpoints and perspectives to a much greater degree” (Little & Hoel, 2011, p.42).

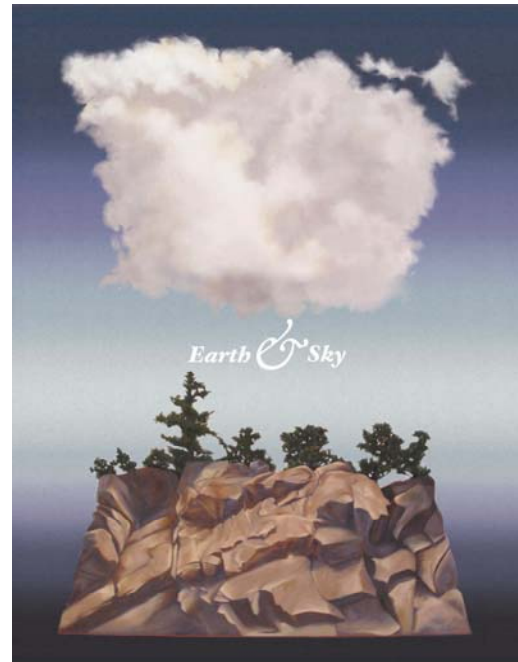
### **Course Assessment: Strengths and Challenges**

For the duration of the Semester, nine students out of fourteen in regular attendance had zero absences! This exceptional attendance record is an indicator of high student interest and motivation towards this class. Students understood that all the components of the syllabus were essential for the success of the course and the service-learning project, and that there was not a substitute to any of them.

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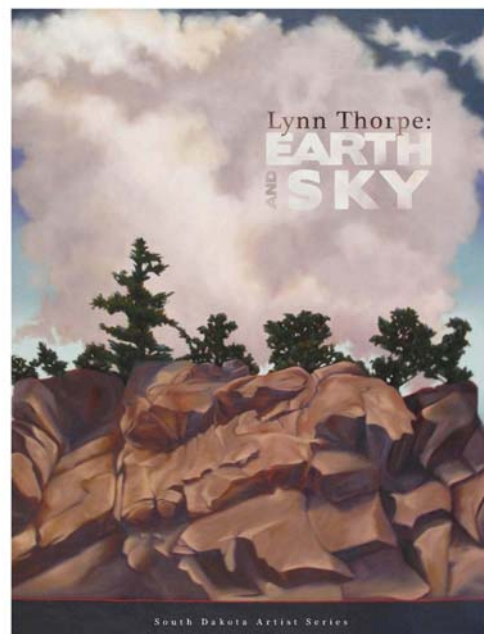
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**Figures 1-4: The four proposed layouts: 1. Tiffany Menke; 2. Mitchell Torbert; 3. Kelly Wilkens; 4. Brett Hanes.**

The following are qualitative data from the end-of-course questionnaire, which involved five lower-division Honors students from diverse academic backgrounds and nine special topics students (most of them from the upper-level) coming from a variety of visual

backgrounds. The comments reported suggest that the combination of theory and practice was perceived as a major strength in this course.

In terms of course structure, in general and with a few exceptions, Honors students appreciated the fact that the course's objectives and goals were made clear from the beginning, and that they have been given the tools and activities to meet those goals; one special topics student appreciated the fact that the course "incorporated many ways of learning and fulfilled the needs of a variety of students." (Spring, 2011). Some Honors students were happy about what they have learnt, while some visual arts students appreciated more the way the two diverse classes have been combined and the experience stemming from it.

Regarding the course's pace, almost all the scheduled activities have been covered in a satisfactory way and timely manner. Besides the deadline pressures during the period of the catalogue preparation, the instructor never felt rushed in trying to keep up with the schedule: the course pace was just perfect. With only a few exceptions, students felt the same way: the course's activities have been generally rated as "well-balanced" and the overall course structure as "well-planned," with a good correlation with the museum's timeline (Spring, 2011). Only a few Honors students felt that sometimes changes occurred with a short notice, "but overall, we were given enough notice to adjust and prepare" (Spring, 2011).

Instead visual arts students, generally of the upper-division level, were able to intuitively perceive that sometimes changes were necessary, in order to make challenging situations work out for the better: one compliment came on the instructor's flexibility "when needed;" another student added that "It was well planned/anticipated, but as an experimental class, it organically changed as the semester progressed;" another student commented that "The syllabus given at the beginning of the semester was well laid out providing enough structure for students to plan and stay on task while allowing room for changes;" "Both planned and unplanned activities were useful and vital to the success of the course;" and finally, "There were inevitable problems that occurred. The class always found a solution." (Spring, 2011).

In terms of the planned activities, with one exception, Honors students particularly appreciated the correlation between the lectures and the field visits, uniting some theoretical and practical aspects. While the guided tour was perceived as improvisational and scary for a few Honors students, from the visual arts students came the comment that the tour allowed them to complete each other: "we each used our different strengths to complete the activity" (Spring, 2011). Best activities were considered, for Honors students, the visits to the art museum, meeting the staff, learning about the 'behind-the-scenes,' being directly involved in feedback and decision-making when the curator brought three possible layouts in class, writing the essay and the publication. Visual Arts students appreciated visiting the museum as well, but also seeing aspects of preservation of artworks, the experience of showing what they have learned in the course, the class critique of the layouts (Spring, 2011). Instead, among the course activities that raised more concern, was for the Honors students writing the essay and the guided exhibition tour, mostly for performance

and competence anxiety, while some visual arts students lamented the redundancy of the art appreciation classes for them, and wished they could have observed the exhibition hanging, which we missed.

Innovative aspects of the course, that were particularly appreciated, were for the Honors students gaining new insights about art museums and getting involved; also the “good learning opportunities” provided by the combination with advanced visual arts students of the special topics class, a comment that came from some students of the other group as well (Spring, 2011). Students from both classes enjoyed the end product of a catalogue, one of them adding that “designing what I’d written about was a great experience.” From the special topics students came a positive comment on the opportunity to follow a project from start to finish through the semester. Another special topics student provided a comment on the amount of “freedom” granted in the course as innovative, because it “made each person’s learning different,” and expressed enjoyment towards the catalogue project: “It was extremely interesting to see the different approaches each student took for the same project” (Spring, 2011). Finally, another student commented that, “Studying and doing some activities is different from any class I have ever taken” (Spring, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The outcomes of this service-learning multidisciplinary experiment show that it possible to foster creativity in a course whose primary purpose is to deliver theoretical content, by seeking solid partnership with other faculty and institutions that can provide opportunities to practice course content through forms of professional involvement. The innovative learning environment balances indoor and outdoor activities, alternatively giving space to the instructor, to the guest speakers and to students; while most of the content is delivered during the indoor activities, the outdoor events become opportunities for intense discussion. The course instructor uses most of the class time to build up the theoretical ground in a few disciplines, such as art appreciation and museum studies. During the trips to the museum or visits to the class by guest speakers, students reflect on the content previously absorbed in class and search for connections between theory and practice. In this way, “students could help construct knowledge in the museum as part of community service that would serve their learning, their peers, and the public” (Innella, 2010).

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## Appendix: Museum Experience Syllabus

### Tentative Course Schedule:

(It may be subjected to changes)

#### GRADE DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY:

(All the assignments will be graded solely by the course instructor).

5%: in-class discussions or acts of participation through the term;

15%: first term paper assessing the *Textural Structures* exhibit

25%: second term paper (service learning: catalog) graded by the instructor;

5%: proposed layout of the exhibition catalog.

10%: guided tours of the exhibit by students during the last week of class.

20% + 20%: Midterm and Finals (wide questions based on the assigned weekly readings).

**Week 1** (Jan. 10) • **Thursday, Jan. 13th**: CLASSES BEGIN. Introduction to the course structure and schedule, syllabus, access to D2L (those students adding after the first day of class, please ask the instructor about access to D2L).

Explanation of the **term project : exhibition catalog on Lynn Thorpe.**

The assignment will require the combination of :

- analysis skills (art appreciation),
- some light scholarship in art history
- some application of the basic knowledge on museum studies accumulated throughout the Semester.

**Week 2** (Jan.17) • **Tuesday**: Behind an exhibition: meet the SD Art Museum

Staff:

- **Lynn Verschoor**, Museum Director
- **John Rychtarik**, Museum Chief Curator of Exhibits
- **Lisa Scholten**, Curator of Collections and Archivist

**Reading:** Patrick J. Boylan, "The Museum Profession". Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 415-430.

- **Thursday**: VISUAL ELEMENTS. Chapter 6, space (Sayre 95-113).

**Reading:** Sayre, chapter 6.

**Week 3** (Jan.24) • **Tuesday** : VISUAL ELEMENTS. Chapter 7, light and color (Sayre 114-146) – part I.

- **Thursday**: VISUAL ELEMENTS. Chapter 7, light and color (Sayre 114-146) – part II.

**Reading:** Sayre, chapter 7.

**Week 4** (Jan.31) • **Tuesday** : *TEXTURAL STRUCTURES*. The Concept of the Exhibition.

- **Thursday**: *TEXTURAL STRUCTURES*. Visit the exhibition at the South Dakota Art Museum: explanations, challenges, possibilities in designing the objects placement. Presented by **John Rychtarik**.

**Reading:** essay in the catalog *Textural Structures* (students will receive one complimentary copy of the catalog).

Week 5 (Feb.7) •• **Classes cancelled both TUESDAY and THURSDAY for Faculty attendance to the CAA Conference in NY City.**

**Reading and writing assignment substituting for these two classes:**

- David Dean, "The Exhibition Development Process". Hooper – Greenhill, Eileen, ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999: 191-200.
- **ASSESSMENT PAPER (15% GRADE):** Reflect on this reading, in relation to the acquaintance with the professional roles of the SD Art Museum's staff members met during the second week, and the *Textural Structures* exhibition development explained during the fourth week. Write a 3-4 pages feedback to assess the exhibition *Textural Structures*:
  - ☐ Its overall goal/s (see the catalog essay).
  - ☐ If, how and to which extent has the exhibition met the SD Art Museum's mission goals (see: <http://www.sdstate.edu/southdakotaartmuseum/Visit/mission.cfm>).
  - ☐ The exhibit concept's strengths and weaknesses (see the catalog essay).
  - ☐ The degree to which the exhibit design has met the room's potential and limits (see the visit to the exhibit room in the Art Museum).
  - ☐ If, how and to which extent has the exhibition met the cultural needs of the Brookings and the State of South Dakota's community.
  - ☐ Positive or innovative aspects, in the overall exhibition, that could be retained and used again in future exhibitions.
  - ☐ Any suggestions for improvement.

By performing this task, you will be responsible for the ASSESSMENT PHASE of the exhibition (Dean 200). The paper must refer to the listed reading. The paper will be assigned 15% of the overall grade for this course.

Week 6 (Feb.14) • **Tuesday:** Chapter 8, other formal elements (Sayre 147-162).

- **THURSDAY, Feb. 17: classes cancelled for ART 200 PROGRESS REVIEW (Department Activity).**

**Reading:** Sayre, chapter 8.

Week 7 (Feb.21): • **Tuesday:** Chapter 9, principles of design (Sayre 163-189)

- **Thursday:** LYNN THORPE. Creating the exhibition concept. Look at the works to include in the exhibit. **Leda Cempellin** and **John Rychtarik** (Special guest).

**Reading:** Sayre, chapter 9.

Week 8 (Feb.28): • **Tuesday:** exhibition and art history: influences on LYNN THORPE, part I.

Readings for the term catalogue project will be listed and explained in separate document.

- **Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>:** **MIDTERM exam. 20% of the grade for this course.** General essay questions covering the readings.

**Reading:** each student will be assigned 2-3 articles or chapters, to read in preparation of the catalog text (see list in the Term Project document). Students will start drafting their portion of the catalog essay (ca.700-1000 words, 2-3 pages), by uniting the historical references of their readings and the formal

analysis of art appreciation. Each student will choose 2-3 paintings by Lynn Thorpe to analyze.

Week 9 (March 7): **MARCH 7-11: SPRING BREAK. No classes this week.**

Week 10 (March 14): End of the first part of the Semester. Deficiencies due in Webadvisor.

- **Tuesday and Thursday:** exhibition and art history: influences on LYNN THORPE, parts II and III. Readings for the term catalogue project will be listed and explained in a separate document.

**Reading:** finalizing the catalog essay.

Week 11 (March 21): • **Tuesday:** LYNN THORPE. Virtual exhibition design demonstration on computer (Special guest: **John Rychtarik**).

- **Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>:** term projects (catalog essays) due for grading and for incorporation in the extensive catalog essay (Editor: **Leda Cempellin**). **25% of the grade for this course.**

Elements of exhibition design theory

**Readings:**

- Communications Design Team, "Spatial Considerations". Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999: 178-190.
- Bill Hiller and Kali Tzortzi, "Space Syntax: the Language of Museum Space". Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 282-301.

Week 12 (March 28): • **Tuesday:** Leda will distribute the finalized catalog (essay and images) to the students of the class for working on the competitive catalog layout. LYNN THORPE. planning the exhibition catalog: essay, illustrations, reproductions permissions, labels for the exhibit.

- **Thursday:** SD Art Museum's collection. Preservation aspects. Special guest: **Lisa Scholten**.

**Reading:**

- Rachel Barker and Patricia Smithen, "New Art, New Challenges: The Changing Face of Conservation in the Twenty-First Century". Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice. An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006: 85-105 (chapter 3: New Art, New Challenges: the Changing Face of Conservation in the Twenty-First Century).

Week 13 (April 4) • **Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>:** competitive catalog layout due for grading and jurying.

Catalog layout: **5% of the overall grade for this course.** Catalog layouts submitted for external jurying and selection of the best one.

LYNN THORPE. Installing the artworks in the gallery. Potential issues and challenges will be explored *in situ*. Observation of **John Rychtarik**, exhibition designer.

- **Thursday:** LYNN THORPE. Installing the artworks in the gallery. Potential issues and challenges will be explored *in situ*. Observation of **John Rychtarik**, exhibition designer.



**ESTIMATED DEADLINES (to get the exhibition catalog printed before the guided tours):**

1. MARCH 24<sup>th</sup>: term projects (individual contributions to the catalog essay) due to the instructor.
2. MARCH 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>: Dr. Cempellin will edit all the contributions into a big file, and if possible, mail it to students by Monday morning, March 28<sup>th</sup>.
3. MARCH 28<sup>th</sup> (Monday) – APRIL 3<sup>rd</sup> (Sunday) small groups meeting to work on the layout and apply to the big file.
4. APRIL 4<sup>th</sup> (Monday, 9.00am): big file, with proposed layout, due to Dr. Cempellin by email ([Leda.Cempellin@sdstate.edu](mailto:Leda.Cempellin@sdstate.edu)), to be forwarded to the jurors.
5. APRIL 4<sup>th</sup> – APRIL 8<sup>th</sup> (Friday): jurying of the catalogue layouts, and selection of the best one. Forward choice to Dr. Cempellin.
6. APRIL 9-10 (weekend): Dr. Cempellin makes last minor adjustments/revisions.
7. APRIL 11: catalog, in the finalized layout, due to the Print Lab
8. APRIL 20<sup>th</sup>: catalogue printed.
9. APRIL 21<sup>st</sup>: catalogue distributed to the students, in order to prepare for the guided tours.

Week 14 (April 11) • **Tuesday**: in-class discussion on the exhibition *LYNN THORPE* and **the service-learning project.**

**LYNN THORPE EXHIBITION: April 12 - August 14, 2011**

- **Thursday**: Art Museums and contemporary artists.

**Reading:** Vera L. Zolberg, "Art Museums and Living Artists: Contentious Communities". Ivan Karp et al. ed., *Museum and Communities*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992: 105-136.

Week 15 (April 18): • **Tuesday and Thursday**: Addressing the diverse needs of museum visitors and marketing strategies. Special Guest: **Dianne Hawks**. Proclamation of the winning catalog layout, distribution of the catalog.

**Reading:**

- John Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2009: 185-206 (chapter 9: Attracting and Building Audiences).
- Lynn Thorpe, exhibition catalog: each student will receive one copy, and will read the entire essay in preparation for the guided tour.

Week 15 (April 26): \* **Tuesday and Thursday**: guided tours at the Lynn Thorpe exhibit run by students. **10% of the overall grade for this course.**

**Week 16<sup>th</sup> FINAL EXAMINATION:**

**THURSDAY, MAY 5<sup>th</sup>: 12.00noon-1.40pm, in the classroom. 20% of the final average grade for this course.** General essay questions covering the readings after Midterm.

**Grade Reporting**

Grades will be reported to the Registrar's Office within **Wednesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>**, and therefore should begin to be available on Webadvisor after that date. Partial grades or the final average grade will be disclosed by the instructor to the student only individually and in person, not by phone, email or any other indirect form of communication.