WID (Writing in the Disciplines) Project report
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Introduction and initial aim of study

The goal for my research project was to find pedagogical support for a few issues that exist in the Fine Art Department.

- Why are students overwhelmed?
- Could a more collaborative learning environment lead to more student success?
- What pedagogical resources are needed for a collaborative learning environment in the Visual Arts program?

The Visual Arts Program is under the umbrella of the Fine Arts Department. The Fine Arts department is comprised of a program - The Visual Arts program and a profile, The Studio Art profile which is part of a program- The Art Literature and Communication program, as well as many other courses taught as part of other programs throughout the Dawson College. The considerable number of courses in a variety of contexts, creates a displacement and confusion for Fine Arts teachers. Courses run as separate entities from each other. A teacher's focuses are on specific Fine Art skills. In the Visual Arts Program, the final exhibition and catalogue of students works at the end of the program does bring courses together. This sense of shared goals in the outcome of the students ' learning experiences should continue to be developed.

I began my search for information to pinpoint or develop pedagogical resources by looking internally into the Visual Art department and externally at another art institution the Ontario College of Art and Design University.

Internally I asked for graphs of student rates of finishing at the college from the Quality assurance office and I created a Miro board that visually depicts the structure of the entire Visual Art program. I also conducted two surveys one to the faculty and the other to recently graduated students. The question and answers will be attached to this document

The external approach was looking at the Ontario College and Art University tool kit for teachers and a meeting with a professor form OCADU Nicole Collins who had work on the development of the tool kit.

In my report, I have divided each of the activities mentioned above into sections. The sections will present further information about the task. I have concluded the report with a section of results and recommendations.

Sections of the report-

Anchor for collection and reflection on information gathered

 I met with Jeff Gandell (WID Director and project supervisor) every two weeks to comment and report on the collection of information. We would go over all the material that was collected and Jeff would offer possible models that could be used to accurately communicate the information within the context of my study. My research project did start to move into two different directions:

1. The first direction was an academic programming or planning overview of the Visual Arts Department. This came about as I began to think about what the is Fine Arts department and its mechanics of how courses are offered. This information starts to address the issue of how students are overwhelmed by course loads. I wrote a definition of all the courses offered by the Fine Arts department. For my study, I needed to have a map or an overview of the Visual Arts department. The map was done for teachers to see the workloads that students must accomplish each semester. This guide of how many courses are taught and what the learning outcomes are, severs as an information flow to foster collaboration.
2. The other direction my study took was to look at what pedagogical tool were being shared by Fine Arts faculty and how a more collaborative approach to pedagogical methods could improve learning outcomes. With better information flow, students would feel more grounded in what they are expected to accomplish throughout the program.

Jeff gave me good points of reference in how to ask and communicate with colleagues about their definition and application of problem solving and critical thinking. I began to collect and create a repertoire of teaching tools such as short writing projects could be done in studio class as well as genral education and art history.

Quality Assurance- numbers and graphs of last 10 years of student graduation rates and learning outcomes

I began by collecting and looking at graphs from Quality Assurance. I looked at the number of students graduating from Visual Arts for a ten-year period. 2009- 2018. Student who had CEGEP experience before entering the Visual Arts seemed to be able to complete the program at a slightly higher rate than those who were attending CEGEP for the for the time. This finding implies that teacher or coordinators need to be clear about what is being asked of the student

at the CEGEP level of education--what a student's goals are and how are they being met by the program and the college

Creation of Miro board which visual depiction of Visual arts program using information from course frameworks

In my research, the creation of [a visual model of the Visual Arts program](#), puts forward a picture of what the entire program encompasses. Art history teachers would have an image of what students were doing in sculpture class. Studio teachers would have an idea of what time periods in art history students are focused on.

This map began with talking to the chair of the Fine arts department Rachel Echenberg. She helped me developed the idea for the visual map. I was given access to the frameworks of the courses in the Visual Arts Program. I also spoke with the co-ordinators of each of the disciplines in the Visual Arts Program. The map illustrates the placement of each course with the discipline and the time frame it is given. I also synthesised or condensed the content of each course into brief section so that the map would show a snapshot of each course as well as an overview.

In creating the map, which gives the faculty a clear idea of what the program is, it is also an excellent base to create shared goals. This overview of the Visual Arts program created another direction that my research took. Rather that collecting information on pedagogical methods and outcomes, the research pointed to the structural development of the program and department.

Miro Board- Visual Arts Program
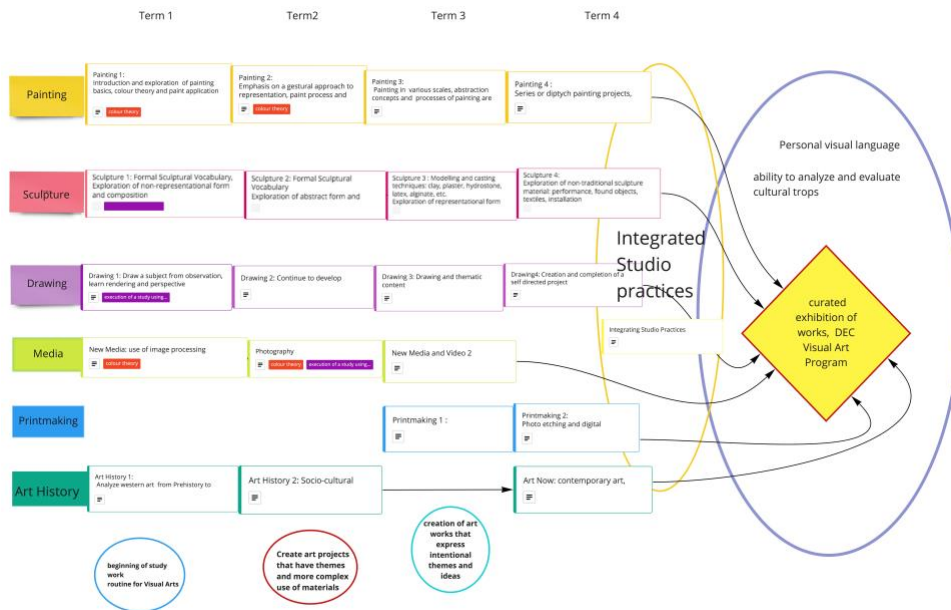
External research link - conversation with Nicole Collins and document of tool kit from OCADU

My research outside of the college was to speak with Nicole Collins, an associate professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. She was part of a team that has created a tool kit for OCADU faculty. The tool kit offers practices that support the idea " OCADU provides a student-centered learning environment where in the first year a common base of art theory, knowledge skills and processes are acquired with an emphasis on concept development and investigation rather than specialization" (OCADU web site).

In my meeting with Nicole a recurring theme was the fostering of collaboration. All parties involved in the learning process have stakes, the co-ordinates, teachers, and students. Teachers as authority figures could be re-evaluated to be a mentor, coordinator, or initiator of scenarios where all participates help to create and learn from. The point was mentioned that working to encourage collaboration is also a decolonization of the teaching system.

 The tool kit that has been created, as a collection of topics and possible lesson assignment is a generous sampling of pedagogical methods. The OCADU tool kit is a useful resource for the Dawson Visual Arts program because it is specifically focused on visual art and students learning how to further develop their path into art making

Feedback from faculty via Forms

I asked my colleagues a brief list of questions from a survey titled " Bridging the gap between art classes and gen. ed or other "writing classes". Half of my faculty did respond. I was met with some hesitation and scepticism of why I was questioning writing as a tool to glean critical thinking in studio art classes. However, all the response to problem solving and critical thinking did give me a better idea of how we as a department approach and introduce materials to our students.

When my colleagues did respond I was happy to see that we do share common ideas about the significance of critical thinking. It was interesting to read how particular and personal each one of my colleagues used the terms. Some focused-on problem solving in terms of materials used to make a work and how to use them. Critical thinking was applied to the creation of works. Some colleagues applied the terms to a more" throughout their course" approach.

The participation in the survey is an indication that our department could have deeper discussions on pedagogy. For example, one of the design principles in "How to use (five) curriculum design principles to align authentic learning environments, assessment, students' approaches to thinking and learning outcomes," by Noel M. Meyers and Duncan D. Nulty is that design problems should be "authentic, real-world and relevant". This could be a guiding principle for course and assignment development. Students use visual imagery to convey ideas and emotions in a spontaneous and carefree manner when they are conversing with friends. How do we see the relevance of the ideas, skills, and materials we teach in 2022 with the thoughts and feeling of students? Do our approaches need to be change? Have they changed? What do your students say about the course? This conversation could continue to the develop the personal approach to problem solving which is a mandate of our courses.

During my time working on this study, fellow faculty members would comment on the lack of information available to them so they could understand all the courses offered by the Fine Arts Department. They were happy to hear of the creation of a document that would have information describing the Fine Arts Department and the various courses in the Visual Arts Program.

Feedback from students via Forms

I did get one student who replied to the survey. The response was a very favourable report about the program. It is not enough to have a good sign of student feedback, yet it is reassuring that a student after being out of the program for two years would still be very happy about the experience.

Recommendations and resources

 I have created a Moodle page for Fine Arts Faculty to use as a resource page. I have put up the link to OCADU tool kit, the Miro board of the Visual Art Program, the current student handbook, a PowerPoint description of the Fine Arts department and a power point of the Studio Arts profile in the ALC Program. I have posted the essay- "How to use (five)curriculum design principles to align authentic learning environment" for faculty to read and I have created a section on the page where faculty can upload any comments, pieces of writing or images that would like to share. I have uploaded a workshop lead by David Baumfleck "Strategies for engagement in Studio courses." The recording of the meeting and the notes taken, offer colleagues the opportunity to hear pedagogical insights from members of our faculty. The page will allow pedagogical tools that are sometimes created by teachers and other times coming from variety of sources be readily available to our faculty. I have made sections in the Moodle board where teachers from specific disciplines- painting, sculpture, printmaking, etc. can upload information. I will continue to update and watch how the page is working for the Fine Arts Department. Eventually, the page could become something that is interactive for teachers to share information.

It would be good to create a visual map or PowerPoint for students to use and to get an overview of the Visual Arts Program.

The description of – problem solving and critical thinking - on the Visual Arts program home page could be elaborated on. The inclusion of individual teachers approaches to problem solving and critical thinking could be mentioned.

The further development of how to describe the Fine Arts department became an area that could be continued. I have met with Monica Lopez (Pedagogical Counsellor), and she was very encouraging about this work. The Fine Arts Department is linked to many different programs and courses in the college. There could be more research done on the pedagogical goals of Studio art and the integration of visual arts with a broader spectrum course.

The Fine Arts Department teaches classes in many career programs. It could be beneficial to gather information from the students in the programs about the value and benefits of the visual arts classes. The importance of creativity and opinion while learning a particular skill.

Teachers in the Fine Arts Department have said that they would like to have more meetings as a department and within their discipline. In the last pedagogical meeting, there was a sharing of ideas about grading and some changes were going to be tried. One being students having a self-reflective grade. In our recent pedagogical meeting, teachers in art history chose to incorporate self-reflective grading into their marking.

From the survey I sent out to Fine Art faculty, I received interesting and engaging approaches to problem solving and critical thinking. Each teacher had their own way of understanding and working with this method of teaching. It would be beneficial to have meetings and discussions to speak about just this point.

The goals of the Visual Arts Program put forward by the Ministry of Education, could also be examined more closely at a faculty meeting. Not to re-write them, rather to listen to each other's interpretations and build on these ideas.

The goals are -

At the end of the *Visual Arts* program, students will be able to:
- ☐ _Determine where they stand in relation to contemporary society and culture
- ☐ _Develop an artistic intention
- ☐ _Determine the role they play in society as emerging artists
- ☐ _Use research methods and information technologies
- ☐ _Use elements of visual language to express themselves in their own artworks
- ☐ _Develop their artistic potential through a variety of practices
- ☐ _Present and showcase their artistic creations
- ☐ _Demonstrate attitudes that foster their personal, social, and artistic development

It would be beneficial for the Department to try and include students' feedback or points of views. Student could comment on whether the goals but forward are the same as the ones they themselves hold or completely different. I am making this recommendation with a backward learning process in mind. Thinking of the outcome and going backwards to see how this is met. For example, students commenting on how they see the role of artist in society would add to the currency of the program.

Next Steps

- The Fine Arts department has added a pedagogical meeting for the entire faculty each semester. This has allowed the faculty to work together in establishing a more collaborative approach to project creation and the overall view of the department.
- The department had discussed and made some changes to grading practices. During the pedagogical meetings, there has been discussion about how each teacher implements the Summative grades and options for the relevance of the organizational grade. Some teachers have divided the grade into two sections of 5% to be shown at mid-term and at the end of the year. Other teachers have made 5% a self-evaluation grade for the students.
- Faculty has made contributions to the Faculty Resource page. Individuals have given recordings of workshops or made suggestion about documents that should be posted on

the page. It is slowly becoming a resource that the entire faculty can refer to and use as a tool.

- There has been discussion of how to integrate more writing into studio courses. Perhaps in how critiques are presented and making links in subject matter between studio and art history classes.
- There may be mentor meetings in the last semester for student to have a couple of meetings with a teacher to discuss their work.

Appendix A: Link to view Miro board password- visualarts
Appendix B: Including+Writing+in+Your+Course-A+Toolkit+for+OCADU+Faculty
Appendix C: Abbreviated results from Faculty responses to questions
Appendix D: Abbreviated Results froms tudent responses to questions

Bibliography-

Including writing in your courses a tool kit for OCADU faculty
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