

UW Academic Challenge and Engagement Study (UW ACES):

School of Art

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INTRODUCTION

Research on learning in college shows that learning is profoundly shaped by the goals, practices, cultures, and values of the academic disciplines², particularly the disciplinary practices in students' majors. Therefore, if we are to understand the kinds of experiences that students find intellectually rigorous (and, thus, engaging), we need to examine challenge in the major. Understanding challenge in the major is important because at every stage of their college experience, students report that they want to be challenged, that they perform better in courses that are challenging, and that they value classes that stretch their thinking and ask them to demonstrate learning more than they value classes that ask little of them.³ Although learning about where students experience challenge is important, asking students to describe challenging learning experiences in their majors requires some prior understanding of how those majors operate. The Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) designed the UW Academic Challenge and Engagement Study (UW ACES) to accommodate these needs.

METHOD

Qualitative methods are recommended when researchers are seeking to understand the complex learning experiences of students, as well as the meaning of those experiences⁴; therefore, we designed the UW ACES to be primarily an interview study.⁵ Using a "citizen science" model, OEA asked departmental advisers if they would be willing to volunteer to interview seniors in their departments who came in to advising to apply for graduation. Advisers are knowledgeable about their academic programs, understand disciplinary practice in their departments, and are trusted by students in the major, so they have the best chance of gathering good information from seniors about their experiences in the major.

Sixty-six advisers from 32 undergraduate programs volunteered to participate. During the 2012-13 academic year, the volunteer advisers asked students if they would participate in brief (5-10 minute) interviews about challenge in the major. If the students agreed, advisers asked them to respond to four

¹ The Office of Educational Assessment acknowledges and thanks Liz Copland for her help with the analysis of the interviews.

² Beecher & Trowler, 2001; Bransford et al., 2000; Beyer et al., 2007; Donald, 2002; Pace and Middendorf, 2004; Wineburg, 2001, 1991; Neumann et al., 2002; Shulman, 1988; Biglan, 1973.

³ Beyer, et al., 2007.

⁴ Merriam, 2001.

⁵ One participating department asked students to respond to the open-ended questions in writing.

open-ended questions, entering students' responses directly into a Catalyst survey form that OEA researchers had designed for that purpose. The questions were as follows:

1. What do you consider to be the most challenging work that you had to complete in this major? And by "challenging" I mean doing the work that stretched your thinking the most. This can be anything—a project, a paper, an exam question, homework, something else you did related to the major.
2. What made the project/class/activity challenging?
3. What did you do or learn that enabled you to meet those challenges?
4. What do you think you learned by completing this project/class/activity?

In addition, advisers asked students in what course the challenging work took place and how many quarters they had until they graduated.

Researchers in OEA conducted training workshops in interviewing skills with all participating advisers, provided individual departments with survey customization if required, and monitored all resulting interviews, reporting back to advisers about the interviews they had conducted. By the end of the academic year, departmental advisers had interviewed 1,237 students. Students' responses were analyzed using a constant comparison method⁶, an inductive process designed to let themes emerge, rather than imposing assumed categories of response on students' comments.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

If we interviewed students post-graduation, they would be likely to identify their capstone courses or their advanced senior-level courses as the ones asking for their most challenging work. However, because we wanted to attach the interview to a time when students would normally see their academic advisers, we interviewed students when they came into the advising office to apply for graduation, which often meant that they were two or three quarters away from graduation. Although this approach meant that we might not gather information about late-senior year courses, we felt that it would be interesting to departments to learn the kinds of challenges that lead to and prepare students for those more advanced experiences.

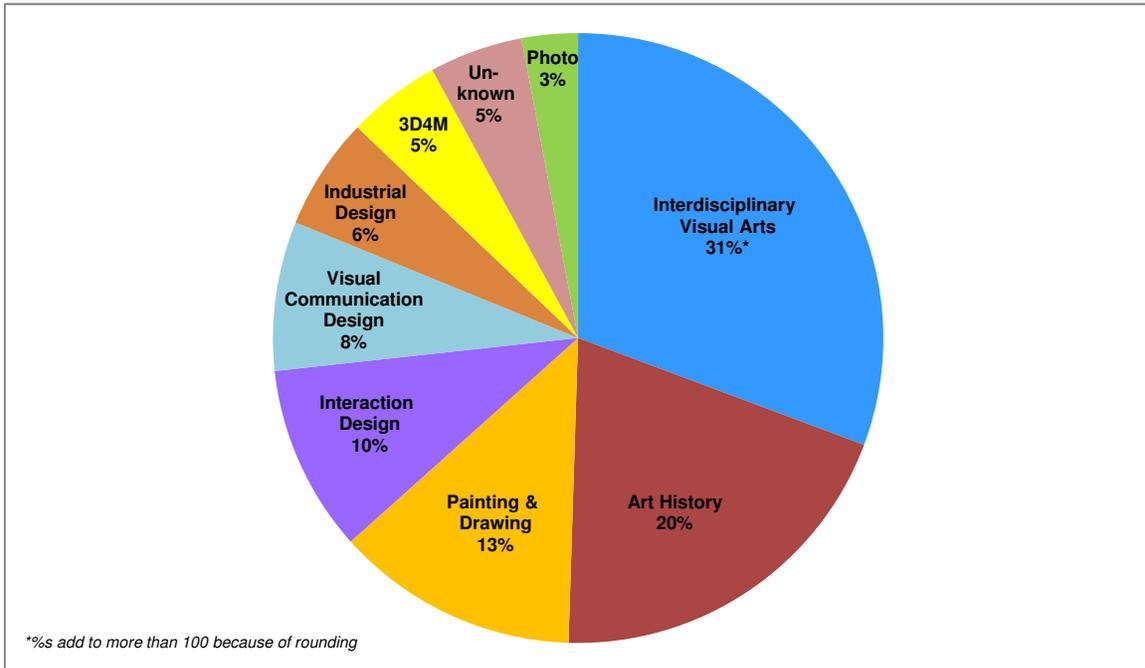
SCHOOL OF ART RESULTS

The School of Art was one of the UW ACES' participating departments. The Director of Academic Advising and Student Services, Judith Clark, and three academic advisers, Liz Copland, Ann Langford-Fuchs, and Laura Todd in the School invited 99 students who were applying for graduation to participate in the interview study. All 99 agreed to participate, and the director and advisers interviewed them. Those interviewed represent about 39% of the 255 seniors who graduated during the 2012-2013 school year.⁷

⁶ Merriam, 2001.

⁷ The number of undergraduate degree completions is based on the 2012-13 UW Profiles reports published by the UW Office of Planning and Budgeting (https://bitools.uw.edu/views/13-SummaryandTrendsDegreeAttributes_0/13-Dashboard#3)

The figure below shows the percentage of interviewees in each of the Art undergraduate majors. As the figure shows, most of the student respondents were in Interdisciplinary Visual Arts, Art History, and Painting and Drawing tracks. Close to a fourth of the interviewees were in the design tracks.



Percentage of interviewees in each of the Art undergraduate majors

Although we did not ask students what brought them into the art major, two of the interviewees told us that they took art courses to complete VLPA requirements and in those courses, they were transformed into majors. In the words of those students:

- *It was actually my first Art History Class that I took from Marek [Wieczorek](#) in spring of 2011. This was the first time I took Art History and it was a large lecture. It was all new. I was just taking it for a VLPA credit, and I became a major. Even with a large lecture class, I was engaged. I knew that it was something special. I woke up every morning excited about what I was going to learn. It was a whirlwind of new ways to think about art. I saved my money and backpacked around six countries in 13 days to see the art in person. I was most interested in surrealist art. I went to Dali's house. I applied for the Gilder scholarship so I could go to Amsterdam.*
- *The back story is that I fell into the major. I took the first class in the Photomedia series to get a VLPA, loved it, was accepted, bloomed and blossomed.*

Quarters to Graduation and Where Students Experienced Challenge

In terms of how long students had before graduating, about 14% had only the quarter in which they were interviewed to complete before graduating; 56% had two quarters left; and 28% had three quarters to complete before graduation. Two percent of the students did not report how long they had left before graduating.

When asked which courses in the major had presented them with the greatest challenges, students listed a total of 62 courses in the School of Art. Four of the courses that students identified were not

numbered, but among the remaining 58, 5% were 100-level courses; 16% were 200-level courses; 48% were 300-level courses; and 31% were 400-level courses. These numbers suggest that students are feeling challenged in courses across the art curriculum, but especially in courses at the 300- and 400-levels.

In addition to students who identified specific courses, eight students identified challenges that occurred across a series of classes or experiences, as follows:

- The major as a whole.
- Each class has contributed to the whole of my learning.
- Higher level classes in the major
- My internship, where I began to use my skills in the real world.
- Lower division classes
- Series drawing and painting classes, 200-300
- Several advanced sculpture classes
- Study Abroad (Studio Art in Rome)

Finally three students mentioned courses outside Art as presenting them with their greatest challenges. Those were:

- Cinema from 1959-1989, winter 2011
- Communication 470
- English 302

Because the areas of concentration in the School of Art are so different from each other, we have arranged the courses that students identified as their most challenging by the interviewees' areas of concentration in Table 1. As the table shows, the courses students identified as presenting them with their most significant challenges most often came from their areas of concentration, which is not surprising.

Table 1. Most challenging courses by field of study

Field of Study	Courses	
No field given	1. Art 190 2. Art 361 3. Design 445, Senior projects	4. Intermediate level course with Professor Garvens 5. Internship, where I began to use my skills in the real world.
3D4M	1. Art 453, Senior Studio 3D4M (4, one of whom was also an Art History major) 2. Art 332 with Tina	
Art History	1. AH 214, Art of India with Professor Carotunuto 2. AH 230 3. AH 309, Picasso with Professor Wieczorek 4. AH 380 (2) 5. AH courses above 380 6. AH 383, Theory and practice of art criticism 7. AH 400 (3, one mentioning Professor Failing, another Professor Wieczorek, and the third Roman Architecture) 8. AH 414 (2)	9. AH 484 (4) 10. AH, Professor Wieczorek, Spring 2011 11. AH, Art Criticism in the 20th Century with Professor Failing 12. Art 337 13. Cinema from 1959-1989, Winter 2011 14. Communication 470 15. Several advanced sculpture classes (also a Visual Communication and Design Major)
Industrial Design	1. Art 317 2. Design 321 (2) 3. Design 445	4. Design 446 5. Each class has contributed to the whole of my learning.

Table 1. Most challenging courses by field of study (continued)

Interaction Design	1. Art 386 2. Design 381 (2) 3. Design 384 (2) 4. Design 386, (2, one mentioning Physical ID and the other Visual Storytelling)	5. Design 387 6. Design 483 7. Design 495 8. Design 499, Form for Design
Interdisciplinary Visual Arts	1. Art 190 2. Art 226 3. ART 233 4. ART 246 5. Art 272 (3) 6. Art 290 (2) 7. Art 292 8. Art 328 9. Art 329, Topics in Fiber 10. Art 332 Intermediate Sculpture 11. Art 334 (3) 12. Art 360 (3, one student mentioning Art and Social Practice and another 3D Modeling)	13. Art, Intro class, Professor Zirpel 14. Art, Series drawing and painting classes 200-300 15. Art, Higher level classes in the major 16. AH 309 Medieval Art 17. AH 380 18. AH 381 19. AH, Chinese Art 20. AH, Contemporary Art 21. Design 166 22. English 302 23. Video DXARTS 400 series
Painting and Drawing	1. Art 390 2. Art 392 3. Art 393 4. Art 490 (3, one mentioning Professor Hurley) 5. Art 494 (3)	6. Art, Study Abroad (Studio Art in Rome) 7. AH 203 8. AH 484 9. AH, Professor Failing
Photomedia	1. Art 341, Digital Imaging 2. Lower division classes ("...because i was confused about what I wanted to do. My professors gave me a lot of great ideas, suggestions, other artists who worked like that.") 3. The major as a whole.	
Visual Communication Design	1. Design 346 2. Design 366, Visualizations 3. Design 376, Advanced Typography 4. Design 383	5. Design 478, Information Design 6. Design 479 7. Design 483

1. Students' Greatest Challenges

Students were asked: "What do you consider to be the most challenging work that you had to complete in this major? And by "challenging" I mean doing the work that stretched your thinking the most. This can be anything—a project, a paper, an exam question, homework, something else you did related to the major."

Three strong themes and several minor themes emerged from students' responses to this question.

A course or courses. Close to three out of every five students interviewed (59%) mentioned a course or courses in response to this question. Several of those students noted that all of their upper division courses presented significant challenges, and a few said that all of their courses in the major presented significant challenges. Several of the students who noted that a specific course or course was challenging also identified specific aspects of the course that were challenging. We coded each of those—the course and the aspects identified—separately. The following quotations illustrate the responses of students who identified a course or courses as presenting them with their most challenging work:

- *Probably the most difficult was Intro to Drawing. It's a completely different way of teaching something that you've been doing your whole life. I learned things from a technical standpoint versus doing it on your own.*

- *The most challenging in the major was Art 332, the installation class. Trying to think about site specificity versus object-in-the-gallery type work [made it challenging].*
- *DES 166. The class stretched my thinking the most. It was my first design class, learning the tools, and trying to get into the major. I was working really really hard to make it happen. Looking back it seems so simple; all of the tasks were so simple.*
- *ART 490 drawing allows me to do projects on my own. I could make my own choices and this pushed me to try things that I have never tried.*
- *Senior seminar, Art 494. That would be because you're no longer applying your interest to a theme or trying to adapt your style to what the teacher expects. Now you're having to do some soul searching for the most important thing that you've always gone back to. What do you see in the world that you've always gone back to? It's unsettling because you do not know where you're going to go, and you have to be comfortable with the unsettled-ness of that.*

Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas. A second strong theme that emerged from students' responses to the question of what their most challenging work in the major had been was having to come up with their own ideas and create something from those ideas. Of the students who identified a specific course or courses as their most challenging experience in the major, 12 (20%) of them also identified this aspect of the course(s)—having to come up with their own ideas, approaches, and projects in the course—as especially challenging. Overall, more than one out of five (21%) of the interviewees mentioned the challenge of not having specific assignments or direction but having to come up with their own ideas, approaches, voices, and pieces—often in their upper level courses. The following five examples illustrate this category of response.

- *I think the most challenging thing was when we moved to senior studio and we didn't have assignments anymore. You had to teach yourself to actually make work. In the environment before that, you didn't really have a lot of opportunities to experiment, so I wish I would have experimented with other materials before. I wish I wouldn't have focused so hard to make one thing each quarter.*
- *The paper I'm working on now because it's the most open-ended.*
- *My intermediate surface design class. The creativity was up to you. It was challenging to tap into a concept and to make that come alive—to have your concept be clear for an audience.*
- *The advanced painting classes are great with Helen and with Zhi. You have to come up with your own projects. Instead of getting the criteria, you have to come up with it. It really expands your thinking. They make sure that you don't produce garbage. Not everyone is going to get the same experience out of it. They give you freedom, but they hold you accountable. It was really interesting to me.*
- *The first time that our professors didn't give us any boundaries. They gave us no outlines for our projects. They said. "Make work, make a lot of work, and we'll discuss it." Working outside of boundaries is outside of how we're taught to think in a learning environment. Going out into the real world, I'm now going to be more confident. There's this dependence on yourself that's new.*

A specific project. Seventeen percent of those interviewed identified a specific project as presenting them with their greatest challenges in the major—the third strong theme in students’ responses to this question. As would be expected, the projects they identified varied widely. The following are examples of this category of response:

- *The most critical point was junior year, winter quarter--a project that required a different approach to design. I was struggling because I didn't like the approach. It made me think about how I wanted to approach design and what kind of designer I would be. It made me self-evaluate and investigate the field for my own sense of direction.*
- *We did this project last spring. We were working in Twisp, WA, and we had to build temporary installations at this forestry sight. We had to come up with these projects on site that would tell the story of the community. It was interdisciplinary with architecture students, which was challenging. There was a real cultural divide between us and the local community members. The community center that we worked with didn't really understand us. They saw us as being privileged. It was a good metaphor for design, when you want to concur on anything big. You'll never be able to see the whole picture, so you'll have to work with what you've got. It was the most challenging experience/project that I've ever had.*
- *That would be Jacob's assignment where we were building stools. It lasted for the entire quarter. He expected a lot from us. It was the most challenging and rewarding and eye-opening. I'm still surprised to look back and see what I could accomplish in five weeks.*
- *In a printmaking course, we were given someone else's garbage and told to make something out of that garbage. It pushed me to work outside of my comfort zone. It also made me think about older projects that I had made before and how I could have made them better.*
- *Video class, the final project. It was a stop-motion video of a sock. I made at my grandmother's house. She helped with the lighting and fed me. Mine was the best grade in class for final project. I knew it was good because I used time wisely.*
- *The glass course that I took. First project of the class. We basically got several pieces of clear glasses and we had to design how we would somehow bring them together with metal. We needed to set up and program the project environment. We had to imagine what the glass would become after being heated. We had no idea what the material would do; we had to guess what it would do.*

In addition to these major themes, there were a few minor themes that emerged from students’ identifications of their most challenging work in the major.

Dealing with the unfamiliar (including concepts, tools, media, and ways of thinking). Seven percent of the art majors interviewed noted that dealing with the unfamiliar presented challenges. For example:

- *One of the classes in my sophomore year when I took the Japanese tea ceremony, and I was way outside what I knew. We had to write a big research paper. It wasn't very difficult, it was just challenging because it was time consuming. It was unfamiliar. A lot*

of the things I can do because I can draw on previous classes, but this one I knew nothing. It was from square one.

- *Working with steel in forging and foundry. This was a new material to me, and I found it very rewarding.*

Writing. Another minor theme, also mentioned by 7% of those interviewed, were challenges presented by the writing students were required to do in art history. The following examples illustrate this category of responses:

- *Writing a research paper. It was the out-of-the-classroom experience. The library experience was amazing, and I had lots of talks with faculty about the project and how to do the research.*
- *Probably last quarter when I was doing the 400-level Indian art/architecture class. We had to write a paper, and it wasn't guided. We had to go to special collections and get some old books and come up with something to write about, come up with a thesis. It was the hardest thing that I have had to do here.*

Other. Between two and four students mentioned the following challenges:

- Learning and using coding
- The senior show or an exhibition
- Working on an interdisciplinary team
- Figuring out what area to major in
- An internship

Relationship of identified challenge to field of study. As Table 2 shows, there was some relationship between students' fields of study and what they identified as their greatest challenges in the major. 3D4M, Art History, Interdisciplinary Visual Arts, Painting and Drawing, and Visual Communication Design students, for example, tended to identify a course as their greatest challenge, and students in Interaction Design tended to mention a specific project. Coming up with one's own ideas was a challenge to a greater percentage of Painting and Drawing, Industrial Design, and Photomedia majors than it was for those focusing on Art History. Indeed, all three Photomedia majors identified having to come up with their own ideas and creating something from those as their greatest challenge in the major.

Table 2. Number and percentage* in field of study identifying challenge

Fields	N	Course/courses	Having to come up with own ideas/voice	Project	Unfamiliar concepts, media	Writing	Coding	Other
No field given	5	3 60%		2 40%	--	--	--	2 40%
3D4M	5	3 60%	2 40%	--	1 20%	--	--	2 40%
Art History	20	14 70%	2 10%	1 5%	2 10%	4 20%	--	3 15%
Industrial Design	6	3 50%	3 50%	3 50%	--	--	--	--

Table 2. Number and percentage* in field of study identifying challenge (continued)

Interaction Design	10	1 10%	1 10%	5 50%	--	--	2 20%	3 30% (2 working w/interdisc teams)
Interdisciplinary	31	19 61%	4 13%	4 13%	3 10%	2 6%	--	3 10%
Visual Arts								
Painting and Drawing	13	11 85%	6 46%	--	1 8%	1 8%	--	1 8%
Photomedia	3	--	3 100%	--	--	--	--	--
Visual	8	4 50%	--	2 25%	--	--	2 25%	1 13%
Communication Design								

*Note: Numbers do not add to 100% because students sometimes identified more than one challenge.

2. What Made Those Activities/Classes Challenging?

Next, students were asked to note what it was about the activity or the class they had described that made it especially challenging. Two students described challenges in courses outside art or responded in ways that were unclear. Of the remaining 97 interviewees, 39% identified more than one reason the course or project they had described was challenging. Four major themes and multiple minor themes emerged from their responses.

Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction. About 27% of the interviewees speaking about the art major said that their greatest challenge was having to figure out what they wanted to do, make, or say, and then to create it. This response mirrors the responses of the interviewees to the question of what they had found most challenging in the major. As noted previously, 21% of the interviewees said that coming up with their own ideas and creating something from them with little supervision was the most challenging thing they had done in the major. Most of the students who gave this response spoke of work they had done or were doing for upper division art and art history courses. Three students spoke about this challenge in relation to internships or work. The following examples illustrate this category of response:

- *No one gave assignments. The expectation was that we had learned enough in the last three years to make independent judgments.*
- *The research part and making up my own topic.*
- *Having that much freedom—that I was totally responsible for the outcome and quality of my work.*
- *The independence that forced me to think outside of assignments.*
- *Having to depend on my own creative process. Being confident in that and not second guessing myself. Whereas, following guidelines of an assignment it is easier to gauge whether what you're making is going to be something of worth.*
- *Coming up with your own projects/things. Being an artist versus being an art student. Something that I didn't have training in. Suddenly when I was given a studio, I wasn't ready, and I wanted them to give me assignments. Maybe I would push myself to make something bigger or I would just use clay. I didn't think about it. It was a weird feeling,*

like a lack of guidance. Suddenly, I didn't have anyone telling me what to do, which I didn't experience anywhere else in the university.

Learning something completely new—a new medium, a new skill set, a new way of thinking. About 27% of the interviewees said that the most challenging aspect of the work they had described in the art major was learning something completely new, including in many cases a new artistic medium. Students mentioned a wide variety of things they had learned as part of the challenges they described, including learning to code, learning to take the environment in which a piece of work is situated into account, learning to budget a project, learning a new way to draw, and learning to work with glass, to name a few. Five of the 26 students who spoke about new learning talked about learning a new technique. The following examples illustrate this category of response:

- *The class as a whole [was what made it challenging]. The wallowing in the uncomfortableness of the new.*
- *It was a brand new skill set; there was nothing familiar about it. You had nothing to go off of, really. I've never done weaving or anything. Trial and error, and Layne was—she knows what she's talking about. Being in the studio with your classmates after hours, we learned a lot from each other. People remembered different things.*
- *I understand now that an art student shouldn't be exclusively focused on one medium. I started doing some sculpture. Wow it is a different world! It connected me to my childhood. I used to like to make crafts, but I went straight into academic painting.*
- *It made you consider your environment a lot more, compared to just the piece itself. You had to think about where, when, and why. It made it much more detailed. It made me more considerate of the whole process.*
- *[What was challenging was] thinking about making in a new way.*

Extending my understanding of the medium and/or discipline. About 10% of the interviewees said that the course or project they had described previously was challenging because it extended what they understood about the discipline or the medium they were working in. For example:

- *It was the upper level courses down at the CMA. I took a class with Leo Burke that was 3D modeling where I used the laser cutter. I took the professional process class with John Young. If you thought you knew everything, you definitely found out that you didn't.*
- *The technical aspect of trying to learn proportions, shading, lighting.*
- *Another thing: there was a lot of reading, a lot of critical thinking. I guess in that regard it wasn't just "title, date, artist." It was more like, "what does this say about society at the time? how can it be interpreted in different ways?" It was much more complex than previous classes. When I think of the word challenging, I think "difficult" or "hard," but for this Jewish art history class I'm taking, I went to my Jewish friend's house, and his grandparents' house who had been in Auschwitz. We talked to them for a long time. There was a lot of experiential learning. We're going to the synagogue. Most art history classes are like "pick something from the internet," but the professor for the Jewish class is a visiting professor, and he's taught in cities with Jewish museums. Seattle doesn't have one, so he says, "Go ask your friends." It's more valuable to look at the object and hold it and look it at from different angles. You can google a certain painting and the*

images are all really different in how they're colored. You can't tell how big it is. You don't get that same feeling [you would get] if you were right in front of it. I wish there was more of an emphasis on the real objects in the art history program because it adds so much.

- *Topics classes. The amount and type of reading is very different than general art history readings. The readings are more theoretical and geographic. They let you explore a topic, which isn't already the case with classes where you are looking at one specific kind of painting. [For example,] the class with Professor Laird on the history of Roman archeology—that class let you explore a topic over a 2000-year period. It helped me see art history as a discipline, as opposed to exploring a period of art history. It's rare to talk about the state of the art history field as an undergrad, and that has been really meaningful.*

Conducting research for a project. Ten percent of the students also noted that conducting research for an art project they were making was what made the work challenging. The following examples illustrate this category of response:

- *Three weeks of research on fire fighters--on their needs, how to design safety for these people.*
- *I had to look for inspiration in lots of different places outside of design—in nature, animals, birds—and draw inspiration from characteristics in nature—speed, flight, calm, harmony.*
- *The idea of making thoughtful decisions through art. Rather than just doing something, it has to be really thoughtful. You have to do research for your topics. An artwork is just the tip of the iceberg, and everything (the research) is what keeps the iceberg afloat.*

In addition to these four themes, students' responses yielded several minor themes.

Translating learning into a concrete object/experience. Seven students (7%) noted the challenge in taking what they had learned in a class and using it to create something else. In the words of two of these students:

- *One of the toughest things to teach as a professor is—there's no established pedagogy for teaching coding languages. There's only so much that a professor can do to aid in the learning process, so after a while the students are on their own. We're used to creating visual things with visual mediums, and they want us to create visual things with abstract visual tools. The professors have to somehow help us connect these abstract things. It's very challenging.*
- *This project came at IxD from a different angle. In other IxD classes, we don't make things as much as we think about concepts. In this class we actually made stuff.*

Working on a group project. Six students said that working on projects in groups was challenging, with three of those students mentioning challenges associated with working in interdisciplinary groups. In addition to these six, one of the two students who spoke about challenges in a course outside the School of Art also identified working in a group as the biggest challenge of the project he identified as the most challenging. Two art majors' comments serve as examples of this theme:

- *Tribal art class. It was so hard. It was not a topic that I find hugely interesting, so it was hard for me to stay motivated. It was the only class that I had a group project in, and I'm not a fan of group projects so that was really hard for me. I was the leader as an art history major, and no one else in my group was an art history major, so they just didn't care. I had to do all the work to get my grade. They were engineers, bio majors, etc. It was a really tough situation.*
- *Probably my project working with architecture students last year, which was Art 394. It was interesting and difficult to work with students who are also designers but in a different way and incorporating that into the real work. Trying to come to common ground with the architecture students.*

Writing about art. Six students also spoke about the challenge inherent in writing about art, two of whom were art history majors. In the words of two of these students:

- *We had three papers that were really hard, and tests too. The papers stretched my thinking the most. The papers were harder for me because you had to make an argument, but with a paper, you actually have to think about and know the information on your own.*
- *I freaked out over writing a paper in my first art history class. It needed to be scholarly, and I didn't even know what that meant. I was a transfer student and international student. Everything was overwhelming.*

Other: Four students each spoke about the following as significant challenges:

- **Talking about art.** (*"As an international student I found the language of talking about art difficult. The experience and vocabulary were new to me."*)
- **Showing work in public.** (*"The experience of putting my work on the wall and having everyone see it and talk about it [was the most challenging aspect]. I had to decide what to show and how to show it."*)
- **Time constraints/management.** (*"The time constraints. I only had a few quarters to really think about it. Coming up with the actual ideas, not actually the making part of it but the conception."*)
- **Level of critical thinking required.** (*"The class was challenging because of the high level of analysis that was required. It was a different way to think about art."*)
- **The desire to create good work/to push myself.** (*"I could have just filled the parameters of the assignment, but I felt like I wanted to see what I was capable of."*)
- **Learning to trust the creative process.** (*"Learning to slow down and be comfortable with the stage when nothing is being actually made."*)

In addition, two or three students identified the following challenges:

- The reading in art history courses
- Thinking about the social impact of the project
- Feeling stuck and needing feedback that I did not get

Finally, 15 (15%) students gave idiosyncratic responses to this question.

Relationship between challenging aspects and field of study. Table 3 shows the percentage of students in each field who gave the same response to the question concerning what made the challenge they had described challenging. As the table shows, there were few differences in students’ responses across the fields of study. The exceptions were: 1) Art History students, who noted that “extending my understanding of the medium and/or discipline” and “conducting research for a project” were challenging more than did students in the other tracks; 2) Industrial Design students, who noted the challenges inherent in time constraints and time management and in the desire to create good work more frequently than did other students; and 3) Interaction Design majors, who identified working in groups and translating learning into something concrete as challenges more often than did other students.

Table 3. Percentage* in field of study identifying specific aspects of challenge

Fields	N	% identifying the same aspect of challenge
No field given	5	No pattern
3D4M	5	60%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction
Art History	20	25%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction 20%: Extending my understanding of the medium and/or discipline 20%: Learning something completely new—a new medium, a new skill set, a new way of thinking 20%: Conducting research for a project
Industrial Design	6	33%: Time constraints/management 33%: The desire to create good work/to push myself
Interaction Design	10	40%: Working on a group project 30%: Translating learning into a concrete object/experience
Interdisciplinary Visual Arts	31	52%: Learning something completely new—a new medium, a new skill set, a new way of thinking 13%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction
Painting and Drawing	13	54%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction 39%: Learning something completely new—a new medium, a new skill set, a new way of thinking
Photomedia	3	66%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction
Visual Communication Design	8	25%: Coming up with and creating something from our own ideas with little direction

*Note: Numbers do not add to 100% because students often identified more than one challenge and because responses often were unique to individuals.

3. What enabled or helped students to meet those challenges?

The third question we asked the 99 School of Art majors interviewed for UW ACES focused on what had helped them meet those challenges they had identified. One of the interviewees did not respond to this question and two others responded but they were speaking of their experience in courses outside the major. Therefore, we analyzed 96 students’ responses to this question. About 41% of those students identified more than one thing that helped them meet the challenges they had described. For example:

I use the critiques to make myself have a thick skin. The facility at the CMA has everything you need to be successful. The faculty offered me every chance to learn and be successful. Collaboration with my peers is super strong, and I couldn't have done anything without the tech staff down there.

Four strong themes and several minor themes emerged from students’ responses to this question.

“Worked at it”/my own efforts. About 41% of the students said that “doing the work,” “keeping at it,” working hard, practicing, and revising had helped them meet the challenges they described. This response is consistent with the challenges students identified, especially the challenge of “coming up with and creating something from their own ideas,” which 27% of the students said was the aspect of their work that made it challenging. The following quotations serve as examples of this category of response:

- *Specific skills that no one had every taught me—practice every day, learn to observe, learn how to accept criticism as a way to grow more knowledge.*
- *You just have to do it. I don't think that any of these things that I'm doing are particularly difficult to learn, you just have to do it. You do it right; you do it wrong; and you learn from that. You don't have time to think about how to do it. You're thrown in there and then you learn from what you did. Trial by fire. You could spend a lot of time researching the best way to do something, or you can just try it. Fail quickly—that's been important for me to learn.*
- *I worked really hard. It was a lot of memorization and a lot of details and a lot of writing. But I was paying attention for the first time.*
- *I read a lot—read the essays again and again and worked hard to synthesize what they were about in my own words.*
- *Keeping working on it. Being determined to make stuff work. Putting a lot of time into everything. I worked on stuff a lot with classmates and we would shout out a question when we needed help. With everyone working collaboratively we were able to get what we needed.*
- *For the painting class, I spent a lot of time in the studio, going over it again and again and again until it looked right. I'm sure it wasn't exactly right. I'm sure the finished piece wasn't right, but it was better. I didn't get the assignment right away but what helped was understanding, thinking more about how light changes the temperature of the color. That was a big moment.*

Collaboration with peers/seeing what peers were doing. A second major theme, mentioned by about 24% of the interviewees, is that peers helped them meet the challenges they were dealing with. Students talked about seeking help from peers, collaborating with them on projects, and seeing the projects their peers were engaged with as helping them learn. In the words of six of these students:

- *The class was discussion and group oriented, and so we reflected together in the class. In most art history classes you do your work independently, but in this class, we worked together as groups.*
- *Classmates are my network. We rely on each other to meet our challenges.*
- *[I learned] to trust peers and teammates. As designers we think we can do it all ourselves. This really helped me understand and work with people.*
- *I just felt motivated in that class. It was that group of people and what they were making that really did it for me.*
- *It was useful just being able to see other people's work and seeing the other projects being made.*
- *I've learned a lot from the other students. I'm learning as much from them as I am from me. Looking around and seeing the work of my peers has really opened up my eyes. In Zhi's class, people are bringing in their own personal narratives and relaying them to you as oil on canvas, and even though it's the same goal, everyone is coming from a different angle. You can't get that yourself, alone.*

Instructors and technical staff. The third strong theme, mentioned by about 23% of the interviewees was that faculty, TAs, and tech staff helped students meet the challenges they had described. In the words of six of those students:

- *You just have to do a lot of installations. It was a part of class. Multiple instructors told us how to do this. In each of my photo classes, each of my professors was teaching us how to do installations. I don't remember which class was the most challenging, but it was taught by Ellen, and I was really overwhelmed, I was afraid of doing installations and Ellen gave us lots of examples and was very patient and we got through it.*
- *The instructor was great at helping with writing.*
- *What was different about this teacher [was that] he injected a lot of motivation. Current faculty expect students to come up with their own motivation, and I think there needs to be a balance. Jacob was a little extreme- but he came at it in a different.*
- *Reaching out to professors [helped me meet this challenge]. They made themselves very available. Also, working with other students who present themselves as being stronger.*
- *I had to really work with my professor. It was just kind of about rethinking what I could do with it. Since it was already someone else's work, it kind of made me think about their mindset as well.*
- *The professor was great. He knew what he was talking about. He pointed me in the right direction.*

Thinking critically about own and others' work and the critique process. Fourteen percent of the interviewees spoke about the role of criticism and critical thinking in helping them meet the challenges they had described. More than a third of this group specifically referred to the critique process. The following examples illustrate this category of response.

- *Talking with faculty, thinking critically about what am I doing. Being introspective and critical.*
- *With my Art History 484—a lot of reading and critical thinking. I got my midterm back and thought, "Oh dear, I can't study the same way." I got together with another person in my class and talked about the themes and issues and politics of the time and that helped a lot. I guess you have to learn the hard way that some study habits don't work! And then again maybe it would have helped if in my lower level classes there was more of an emphasis on themes and learning more about the underlying values of the works we were looking at instead of "name, date, artist" because that tripped me up when we got to higher levels.*
- *The critique days were very helpful. Even though you might disagree with your classmates and your instructor, you had to take that information in and think outside of the box for your project so that your ideas made sense. In the middle of the making process there was a lot of internal struggle to decide and commit to a way of making. When you have a finished project, it's really rewarding and when other students finally see your vision.*

- *It was helpful to have the opportunity to see everyone’s work—they were all so good!—and to have the critiques with the other students. It was especially helpful to have the mid-semester critique.*

In addition to these four strong themes, several less prominent themes emerged from students’ responses to this question.

Research/learning to research. About 10% of the interviewees spoke about learning to research their projects, and “research” was used in every sense of the word. Some students spoke about getting help from librarians, for example, and others spoke of learning to look for images and ideas in places outside themselves. Four students’ quotations serve as examples of this category of response:

- *To explore and open my mind to directions that I hadn't thought could influence design. Make a coffee pot based on abstract shapes, think about feelings and movement rather than what a coffee pot looks like now. How to look at nature as a place to draw inspiration and new ideas.*
- *In basic coding, how to look for other resources, how to find information for ourselves and be resourceful.*
- *We had heard talks from historians. We talked to community members, I used the special collection in the UW library. We want to find legends from the Native Americans in that area, but the natives are pretty much gone in that area.*
- *How to use the library.*

The reading. Six percent of the interviewees said that the reading they had done had helped them meet the challenges they described. In the words of two of these students:

- *Looking at how the artists in the articles talked about their work, using terms that we had used in class, guest lectures in class (very helpful), tying it all together. Linking together all of these moments together from class and readings was what helped me through it.*
- *The reading and class discussions exposed me to the terms which gave me the vocabulary to practice the descriptions.*

Synthesized/connected ideas across courses. Four (4%) students noted that synthesizing ideas within or across courses had helped them meet the challenges they described. For example:

[My challenging project] has encouraged me to synthesize material, not to just pick up little pieces, but take the broader view of what I'm learning. Find the forest, not just look at the individual trees.

Other. In addition, two or three students mentioned the following as factors that helped them meet challenges:

- Gaining confidence
- Becoming aware of/feeling part of a community of artists
- Learning that “sometimes less means more”
- “Accepting my own discomfort”
- Learning how to write better about my work/others' work

- Learning about the whole process of a major art project from budgeting to artist statement
- Time management

Finally, nine (9%) students gave responses that were idiosyncratic so could not be categorized.

Relationship between what helped students meet challenges and field of study. Table 4 shows students’ responses to the question of what helped them meet the challenges they described, organized by field of study. As the table shows, there were some differences worth noting. Unlike students in the other fields, students in 3D4M primarily credited faculty/tech staff with giving them the help they needed to meet the challenges they described. Students in Art History and Industrial Design largely felt that their own efforts were what allowed them to meet the challenges they faced. In contrast, the majority of students in Interaction Design felt that they got help from their collaborations with peers, and close to a third of these students felt that learning to conduct research was also helpful. Students in Painting and Drawing and Visual Communication Design felt they received help in meeting challenges from their own efforts, but students in Painting and Drawing also credited instructors/technical staff for helping and students in Visual Communication Design credited peers.

Table 4. Percentage* of students in each field identifying items as helping them meet challenges

Field of study	N	Own Efforts	Collab w/ Peers	Instructors/ Tech Staff	Think Critically/ Critique	Research	Reading	Other
No field given	5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3D4M	5	--	40%	60%	40%	--	--	--
Art History	20	65%	10%	25%	--	--	--	--
Industrial Design	6	66%	--	--	--	--	--	--
Interaction Design	10	--	60%	20%	--	30%	--	--
Interdisciplinary Visual Arts	31	32%	19%	13%	13%	--	--	10% Time Mgmt
Painting and Drawing	13	31%	--	38%	--	--	--	--
Photomedia	3	No patterns						
Visual Communication Design	8	38%	38%	--	--	--	--	25% Sometimes less=more

*Note: Numbers do not add to 100% because students often identified more than one challenge and because responses often were unique to individuals.

4. What did students learn by completing this project/class/activity?

Finally, we asked students what they believed they had learned by completing the challenge they had described. Six of the interviewees either gave no response or gave responses to this question that we could not analyze. The responses of the remaining 93 interviewees were fairly idiosyncratic, and no dominant themes emerged from those responses. Instead, a number of small themes emerged.

You can learn through mistakes; just stick with it. About 14% of the interviewees whose responses we could analyze said that the challenges they had described taught them to push themselves through difficulty and to value the lessons learned in making mistakes. For example:

- *Stick with something, and do not give in and throw in the towel, despite how daunting the task may be. It's so easy to divorce something that looks bad in the moment, and if you stick with something, it will eventually get to where you can tolerate it.*

- *[I learned] that I'm capable of producing quality pieces through trial and error. I learned as much through mistakes as through success. That's hard in the moment of failure but rewarding in the end.*
- *The improvement I have made is amazing to me. I'm more open to making mistakes and learning from them. More open to taking on new challenges.*
- *Even if things are really daunting at first, if you stick with it, you can come up with something that is successful. Fake it till you make it. Everyone's projects weren't elegantly coded, but we learned what we needed to make the projects work, even if they didn't look perfect.*

That I can use what I've learned in what comes next—a career, graduate school, a career as an artist.

Twelve percent of the interviewees spoke of learning something from the challenges they described that would be beneficial in their lives after their undergraduate programs. In the words of four of them:

- *For my internship at the gallery, I feel like it has tested how well I know Art History. It's given me a starting ground when looking at a new piece. I can place pieces by analogy from other pieces that I learned about in class. I knew that I was learning these great skills, but I didn't necessarily understand how they would translate into job skills, but I get to use them, so I should probably send a thank you note to my instructors saying, you've helped me in getting my career off the ground. I've used most of the things that I've learned in a real life context, which is great.*
- *How to work with people. I've done a lot of projects working with people before, but professionals are very different. A work environment is very different from a school environment. I learned the kind of people that I want to work with, and who I work with well. The collaboration environment of Amazon was really wonderful, and I felt like I had to adapt and grow to keep up. I enjoyed the experience.*
- *I learned a lot about different paths that you can take and also what they are looking for at the grad school level. All options are open for the future, but it's something that I'm thinking about*
- *How to create an artist statement and operate in the world as an artist. This brought all the pieces of the degree together for me.*

Who I am as an artist and how to bring myself into my artistic work. The challenges students described taught about 11% of the interviewees something about their identities as artists. They described understanding their artistic selves better, learning how to bring themselves into their own work, and that they could rely on their own artistic ideas. As three of them put it:

- *I learned how to bring my personal life story into focus through my art, which has been very helpful.*
- *It was this awkward process of me trying to decide what is art, and why should I make it, and then gradually it became what am I interested in. It went from this weird self-consciousness, and then I became less self-conscious. I started making reflections of me, and making the art that I cared about. I was around all of these students that were also making their own work. It made me feel inspired to make things that I found were interesting.*

- *It was more about how to be an artist, rather than just making art. This whole process was about becoming an artist.*

How to analyze; how to think critically and deeply. Nine percent of the interviewees said that the challenges they had described had taught them to think more critically and deeply than they had done before. As two of them said:

- *I learned problem solving and about looking deeper into things, not just looking at the surface.*
- *I think I've learned to think more critically and completely about not only an art object but what that object means, who it was created for, why it was created—that social and historical context. And from there I can understand more about that culture and that time that you can never go back to but all you have are these objects and literature. Critical thinking. I don't really accept things at face value anymore.*

Other. Seven (8%) interviewees identified each of the following four lessons learned from meeting the challenges they had described:

- **To be comfortable with the unknown.** 1) *“Recognizing that it doesn’t have to be a perfect reflection of yourself; it’s okay to share something that’s still in progress. Learning through it, learning to be comfortable with the unknown.”* 2) *“Learning to slow down and be comfortable with the stage when nothing is being actually made.”*
- **How to use criticism.** 1) *“Specific skills that no one had ever taught me: practice every day; learn to observe; learn how to accept criticism as a way to grow more knowledge.”* 2) *“You need a lot of critiques done. When you look at someone else’s work, you see all of these things that they didn’t see. I needed reactions from my peers in order to be successful.”* 3) *“The critique days were very helpful. Even though you might disagree with your classmates and your instructor, you had to take that information in and think outside of the box for your project, so that your ideas made sense. In the middle of the making process, there was a lot of internal struggle to decide and commit to a way of making. I decided to use the process that was the simplest to use because our time frame was so short, and I was able to refine that skill even though it was simple.”*
- **To apply something learned in one class to another.** 1) *“It contributes to what I have to contribute as a studio major. Knowing that, I know what I have to build on and reference. That’s why art history is important; that’s what it’s supposed to do for studio majors.”* 2) *“I learned that the 3D project can be applied to my painting and drawing. If I have an idea but don’t know exactly how to start, I can make something three dimensional. I can look at it from different angles and get a sense of space.”*
- **Information about the field I’m in or about a new field.** 1) *“I had always thought of design as designing systems, and I think that’s still true with small systems, like a website, but in terms of large systems, like a community, it’s about finding the places that you can intervene to design solutions, instead of hoping/aspiring to overhaul the whole system.”* 2) *“It opened me up about color, how it works.”*

In addition, three or four students identified each of the following as lessons they had learned from the challenges they met:

- How to pay attention, be observant
- How to produce better work
- The relationship between art and culture
- How to work with a group; the value of collaboration
- How to conduct research and find information
- A new way of thinking about an area
- How to manage my independence/time better

Two students identified each the following:

- There is a community of artists out there that I can be part of
- How to be a better writer
- How to have control over all aspects of a project
- That art affects individuals differently

In addition to these responses, about 12% of the interviewees identified things they had learned that were unique to them.

Relationship between what students learned and field of study. Although there were often more differences between interviewees’ responses within the areas of study than across them, we could identify a few patterns within each field, as Table 5 shows. Although the patterns were not strong, what the table makes clear is that what students said they learned in each area of focus was somewhat different from what students in other areas noted.

Table 5. Percentage* of students giving the same lesson learned from the challenges they described.

Fields	N	% identifying the same lesson learned from challenge
No field given	5	No pattern
3D4M	5	80%: Who I am as an artist and how to bring myself into my artistic work 40%: There is a community of artists out there that I can be part of
Art History	20	25%: How to analyze; how to think critically and deeply 15%: How to pay attention, be observant 15%: The relationship between art and culture
Industrial Design	6	No pattern
Interaction Design	10	20%: Information about the field I'm in or about a new field 20%: You can learn through mistakes; just stick with it
Interdisciplinary Visual Arts	31	19%: That I can use what I've learned in what comes next—a career, graduate school, a career as an artist 13%: You can learn through mistakes; just stick with it 13%: How to use criticism
Painting and Drawing	13	15%: Who I am as an artist and how to bring myself into my artistic work 15%: To be comfortable with the unknown 15%: To apply something learned in one class to another 15%: Information about the field I'm in or about a new field
Photomedia	3	66%: You can learn through mistakes; just stick with it
Visual Communication Design	8	25%: You can learn through mistakes; just stick with it 25%: To be comfortable with the unknown

**Note: Numbers do not add to 100% because students often identified more than one challenge and because responses often were unique to individuals.*

SUMMARY

In speaking of their most challenging work in the major, School of Art interviewees focused on specific courses, on being required to develop their own ideas (as opposed to fulfilling assignments) for projects, and on specific projects as aspects of the major that they felt were their most challenging. A few students also noted the challenge in dealing with the unfamiliar and in writing, primarily for Art History courses.

Students felt that what made that work challenging was coming up with and creating something from their own ideas with little direction and learning something completely new, such as a new medium, skill, or way of thinking. In addition, some students mentioned that extending their understanding of the medium or discipline they were working in, conducting research for a project, translating learning into a concrete object, working on a group project, and writing about art were aspects of their courses or work that especially challenged them.

The interviewees attributed much of their ability to meet the challenges they had described to their own efforts. They spoke about working hard, practicing, and “keeping at it” as what helped them handle the challenges in their work and courses. Students also noted that collaboration with peers and seeing what peers were doing in a project helped them meet the challenges they had described, as did help from instructors and technical staff. In addition, students noted that thinking critically about their work and the work of others (including during the critique process), and learning to research their projects were helpful as they met the challenges they described.

In terms of what they learned by completing the challenges they had described, students noted that they learned to stick with a project even after failure because mistakes could be instructive. Also, some students said they learned that they could use what they had learned in their next life step. Several students noted that the challenges they described had helped them learn who they were as artists and how they could bring themselves into their artistic work. In addition, interviewees said that they had learned how to analyze and think critically and deeply about art from the challenges they described. Finally, a number of students noted that they had learned to be comfortable with the unknown, how to use criticism, to apply what was learned in one class to another, and new information about their own field of study or a new field.

As the tables in this report show, students’ responses to all four questions varied by area of focus in the School, which suggests that there are significant differences in the challenges experienced in those eight areas. However, as this report shows, some challenges—such as coming up with one’s own idea and then creating it—and the things that helped students meet them—such as “sticking with it”—crossed fields of study.

The challenge in generating ideas was a strong theme across all students’ responses to all four questions, as the four examples that end this report show. This finding may suggest an area of conversation for School of Art faculty, TAs, and technical staff. How do we teach students to generate their own creative ideas or help them know what it is they want to express? Students in nearly every discipline are concerned with that question, but in creative disciplines generation can seem to be a more mysterious and isolated process than it may appear to be in the sciences, for example, where students learn early that they need to build their questions into and from the work of others. Also, when freshmen start their programs in the School of Art, they often report having had no experience with the

idea that art is about ideas, which explains why generating ideas and finding ways to bring themselves into their artwork is so challenging for them.

Art majors' responses to the UW ACES interview questions suggest that explicit discussion of how artists generate ideas, including faculty members and TAs speaking about what this step in the creative process means to them, might be helpful to students. Furthermore, if such conversations occurred early in the major, they might bridge the gap that interviewees referred to between completing assignments in early courses and generating their own work in their upper-level courses. In addition, the School of Art has deep connections with the Seattle art community and a reputation for bringing members of that community into the university to speak with majors about artists' lives after college. If community members were asked to talk about how they continue to generate creative ideas over time, that information is likely also to be helpful to School of Art majors.

Finally, students' responses to the UW ACES interview questions suggests that art majors felt the challenges they described were rewarding. This is consistent with research on student learning, which shows that when an assignment is challenging for students and when instructors help students meet those challenges, students are engaged in their courses and, therefore, learn more than when coursework is easy.

Four Students' Responses to All Four Questions

3D4M Student

Q1. What was the most challenging work you did? I think the most challenging thing was when we moved to senior studio and we didn't have assignments anymore. You had to teach yourself to actually make work, in the environment. Before that, you didn't really have a lot of opportunities to experiment, so I wish I would have experimented with other materials before. I wish I wouldn't have focused so hard to make one thing each quarter. It was hard because I felt like I needed to do a project, but because it was just me inventing the project, I didn't push myself to do new things.

Q2. Why was it challenging? Coming up with your own projects/things. Being an artist versus being an art student. Something that I didn't have training in. Suddenly when I was given a studio, I wasn't ready, and I wanted them to give me assignments. Maybe I would push myself to make something bigger or I would just use clay. I didn't think about it. It was a weird feeling, like a lack of guidance. Suddenly I didn't have anyone telling me what to do, which I didn't experience anywhere else in the university.

Q3. What helped you meet that challenge? It was this awkward process of me trying to decide what is art, and why should I make it. And then gradually it became "what am I interested in?" It went from this weird self-consciousness, and then I became less self-conscious. I started making reflections of me, and making the art that I cared about. I was around all of these students that were also making their own work. It made me feel inspired to make things that I found were interesting. I realized through talking to my peers how to formulate an idea. Taking other art courses, and working in galleries...I realized how people outside the university are making art because they care about it. I felt that I had a larger community of peers who were making things, that they are passionate, and that is normal.

Q4. What did you learn by meeting that challenge? Being a student is an unnatural way to make art, and you don't really understand how to make art, but in this studio, it made me realize why you do it. Not because you want to be some eccentric person, but because you want to make objects.

Art History/Interdisciplinary Visual Arts Student

Q1. What was the most challenging work you did? 300/400 level sculpture classes. The projects were open ended. I needed to use the skills I had gotten in lower level classes and develop my own visual voice.

Q2. Why was it challenging? Having that much freedom and that I was totally responsible for the outcome and quality of my work.

Q3. What helped you meet that challenge? I sketched a lot and made a lot of very bad projects. I learned what would work and what wouldn't.

Q4. What did you learn by meeting that challenge? That I'm capable of producing quality pieces through trial and error. I learned as much through mistakes as through success. It was hard in the moment of failure but rewarding in the end.

Painting and Drawing Student

Q1. What was the most challenging work you did? Senior seminar, Art 494. That would be because you're no longer applying your interest to a theme or trying to adapt your style to what the teacher expects. Now you're having to do some soul-searching for the most important thing that you've always gone back to. What do you see in the world that you've always gone back to. It's unsettling because you do not know where you're going to go, and you have to be comfortable with the unsettled-ness of that.

Q2. Why was it challenging? The work is no longer valued by looking at the work of your peers, but solely on the work that you yourself are making. In Art 490, you're really cut loose; you're just producing. In 494, they really challenge those ideas, ask you questions about why. It would be stifling if you were challenged right away before you had the chance to experiment [in 490].

Q3. What helped you meet that challenge? I guess I read. I took a lot of knowledge from all of my classes, my other classes that were non-art classes, especially English 207, a cultural class on Karl Marx and social philosophy. I took ideas that I had been thinking about but couldn't apply to other projects and started producing and redefining my proposal, and becoming more and more specific with the work.

Q4. What did you learn by meeting that challenge? In trying to make something that's totally unique to the way that you view the world and paint or draw, you learn a lot about yourself and how much art really matters to you. For me, you kind of realize how invested you are. How much are you willing to feel? How much do you know that it's all going to matter in the end?

Visual Communication Design Student

Q1. What was the most challenging work you did? I took a visualization class, first quarter my junior year. At that moment I realized just how far design could take me. Thrilling! The scope and range possible made me really excited.

Q2. Why was it challenging? The idea that that there were no limits to what I could do in design.

Q3. What helped you meet that challenge? I tried everything including Jell-O molds to illustrate brain trauma for an assignment.

Q4. What did you learn by meeting that challenge? Figuring out my creative process and knowing that failure can be a big learning tool. Don't be afraid to try and fail. I stopped looking at what everyone else was doing and had the thought "I can have ideas too."

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