

PCF FINAL REPORT

May 29, 2017

❑ Project Title

Developing a pre-capstone course “Art 184: Junior Seminar: Research as Studio Practice”

Art Practice Department, Fall 2015 and Spring 2016

❑ Project team members

- Associate Professor Brody Reiman and Assistant Professor Stephanie Syjuco
- Graduate Student Researchers: Michael Berens (MFA 2016) and Shari Paladino (MFA 2017)

❑ Context of the program/course

We developed a hybrid seminar/studio undergraduate class for majors in the Art Practice Department called Art 184: Junior Seminar: Research as Studio Practice, that focuses on the significant ways artists and cultural producers create bodies of *research* -- within their studios, the academy and the wider world. Countering the idea of the lone artist who generates ideas within the confines of their private studios, this class promoted models of cross-disciplinary collaboration and interdisciplinary thinking via readings, lectures and field trips to engage with artists working in areas such as public policy, urban planning, biotechnology, digital humanities, material sciences and beyond. Students were encouraged to take advantage of both local campus research resources (university libraries, lab facilities, lecture series, museums, and Centers such as the Arts Research Center and the Berkeley Center for New Media, to name just a few) and the larger world of off-campus individuals, organizations and institutions. Based on this outward exploration, students incorporated these interdisciplinary models within their own studio practice, reflecting wider fields of knowledge and research.

Class meets twice a week for three hours, for a total of six hours a week. In general, the first class of the week is a seminar component involving presentations and directed discussions. The second class meetings involve site visits to artist studios, research facilities, organizations, or exhibitions. As the semester progresses, the second weekly class meetings shifts toward self-directed research and studio time to prepare for the final research presentations. Students are expected to work a total of 12+ hours a week for the class.

Rather than presenting a final artwork at the end of the semester, students were responsible for presenting their compiled research and small-scale experiments, targeting future projects for their final year at Berkeley. Emphasizing process over immediate product, Art 184: Junior Seminar challenged students to be self-reflective and rigorously inquisitive with their own ideas and experiments.

❑ Goals of your project, including curricular gap or issues you addressed in your project

Developing this course was a crucial component to revamping and restructuring our upper-division studio/seminar selection for Art Practice majors. Department faculty had identified a gap in students' ability to produce projects independent of specific assignments and work confidently on a research-based studio project during their final year. We realized that since our lower-division courses were developed for majors and non-majors alike, the general level of investigation was not rigorous enough to prepare our majors for the final required capstone course, Art 185: Senior Projects.

Compounding this problem is the fact that many of our majors are transfer students who enter during their junior year and come with various skill levels and research experience. We needed a course that brought students up to speed and on the same page at the midpoint of their degree to expose them to the methods needed to become confident makers and thinkers. Many of our students are also double majors in areas such as psychology, rhetoric, computer science, and history, and their increasing interest in bridging their studio work with other disciplines is a natural extension of developing this new research-based studio class.

❑ In pursuing these goals, what did you accomplish?

Beginning in Fall 2015 we successfully developed and ran Art 184 Junior Seminar for a total of three semesters and will continue to do so once a year for the foreseeable future. We purchased media and books to support the course and as permanent resources for the department. We are able to target and steer students towards this class who then go on to implement and thrive in their final two years at Berkeley. The results are marked and tangible. We see the course as a success in both immediate and long-term goals and the quality of student work and confidence has risen dramatically.

❑ What did you implement and what were the steps to get there? What role did your GSR play in the process?

We implemented a class rich in readings and discussion, field trips, student presentations, workshops, and studio critique. Dialogue and exposure to arts professionals, galleries, museums, wider world exposure proved critical as well. Students produced individual research blogs in order to self-reflect on their progress and developed independent projects to show to the class. GSRs played an active role in the classroom and studio in conversation and gathering feedback from the students, and also assisting in research for weekly lectures. They helped to gather data from the focus groups. They also were prime role models for undergraduates to interact with and be mentored by and an unexpected bonus has been the lasting guidance beyond this particular course which has fostered stronger ties between graduate and undergraduate students in general.

☐ Summarize any information/data gathering and its findings that informed your curriculum/course planning and improvement. If you have a survey or focus group prompts you used, please append them to this report.

Faculty across the department have witnessed a marked growth in student ambition and projects. Students who completed the course have used their critical thinking and independent research towards their other classes as well as the capstone class. Our last two Senior exhibitions have been of high caliber and we believe Art 184 played a strong part in better preparing our students for their final two years at Berkeley. We conducted a focus group with both classes at the end of the Spring semester where the students voiced what components of the class resonated as productive, redundant, and/or challenging, And most recently in a separate exit survey project targeting graduating seniors overwhelmingly referenced ART 184 as a pivotal experience and confirmed the necessity for the course to be a permanent and required part of the curriculum.

☐ Describe how your project will be sustained and/or expanded beyond the end of the project period. What are the challenges in sustaining or expanding your effort?

The Art Practice department feels the development and implementation of Art 184 Junior Seminar has been a resounding success, and is a necessary part of our curriculum moving forward. Because of budget and course limitations however, we can only offer it once a year (as opposed to every semester) and without GSR support. The challenge will be in targeting students at the right time since it will only be offered in a more limited timeframe, as well as working with a restricted budget to support the

course. But because of our two-year experience in developing the content under the PCF grant, we feel confident that the course we developed has been given a strong head start and will maintain itself as a strong addition to our curriculum.