BRAVE NEW BASICS:
CASE PORTRAITS OF INNOVATION IN UNDERGRADUATE
STUDIO ART FOUNDATIONS CURRICULUM

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

By the end of the 20th century, many independent schools of art and art departments embedded in comprehensive universities required undergraduate students to complete a series of introductory courses commonly referred to as foundations. Interpreted literally, these foundations were perceived as the basic building blocks for all artistic practice. Regardless of a student’s future studies in fine or applied art forms, in tactile or digital media, she was required to start out with these fundamentals. Organized around drawing, color theory, and concepts in 2- and 3-dimensional design, the standard foundations sequence prioritized formalist concepts and technical proficiency.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the goals and objectives of traditional foundations are actively being challenged. While some argue that beginning students still need to become fluent in a fundamental visual language defined by the elements of art and principles of design, others look at the diversity of practices, purposes, and contexts for making art in the early 21st century and wonder if it is possible or desirable to define a single set of commonly employed, fundamental skills and concepts. Amidst the pluralism and criticality of the contemporary art world, alternative foundations curricula have begun to emerge.

Brave New Basics: Case Portraits of Innovation in Introductory Undergraduate Studio Art Foundations Curriculum describes two programs that reflect developments in
postmodern artmaking and theories of critical pedagogy. This report is the result of my examination of introductory courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year. On my visits, I reviewed institutional documents, observed classes, and spoke with faculty and students. I used Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1983) portraiture methodology to guide my observations, analysis of data, and eventual construction of contextualized narratives to describe these non-traditional foundations programs.

I hope that my descriptions of these programs will provide those contemplating, embarking upon, and critiquing undergraduate introductory studio art curricular reform with models to consider.
Dedicated to my grandparents.
Sam, Sylvia, Paul, & Sarah
whose lives served as lessons that with hard work, a little of love,
and a lot of chutzpah you can do anything.
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**FIELDS OF STUDY**

Art Education

Critical Pedagogy

Contemporary Art
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Study Innovations in Undergraduate Studio Art Foundations?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Issue</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Purpose</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Questions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Research Design</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Overview of Chapters</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH CONTEXT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing Portraits of Innovative Undergraduate Studio Art Foundation Curricula</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism: A Revitalized Context for Creation and Curriculum</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Modernism</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blurry Boundaries</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcultural Considerations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogy: A Call for Radical Revisions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking Relationships Between School and Society</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose Knowledge is School Knowledge?</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards 21st century Art Foundations: Enacting a Dynamic and Critical Praxis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Thematically Across Media</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting Studio Practice and Art Interpretation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing Digital Technology</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
   On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher.................................55
      Methodological Issue Interlude: Researcher Predilections and
      Theoretical Sensitivity..............................................57
   Methodology #1: Descriptive Case Study................................59
      Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility as Transferability...60
   Methodology #2: Portraiture...............................................62
      Methodological Issue Interlude: Participant Reciprocity and
      Institutional Support.................................................64
   Data Collection.............................................................65
      Institutional Observations.............................................68
      Institutional Documents...............................................69
      Faculty interviews.....................................................70
      Student Focus Groups..................................................75
   Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility through Triangulation...78
   Data analysis.................................................................80
      Identifying Themes.....................................................81
      Constant Comparative Analysis......................................83
      Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility through Member
      Checks.................................................................84
   Conclusion: Portraiture in Progress.....................................85

4. CASE PORTRAIT #1: CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY
   Contemporary Curriculum in Context
      Pittsburgh, PA: The Town Andrew Carnegie Built..................86
      Instructional Interlude..................................................86
      Carnegie Mellon University: A Comprehensive Academic
      Environment.............................................................88
      Educating Students, Benefiting Society.............................92
      Instructional Interlude..................................................94
      The College of Fine Arts: Respecting Tradition, Encouraging
      Innovation.............................................................95
   Considering Current Curriculum........................................98
   Foundation Media Studios: Multi-media Impressions..................100
      Instructional Interlude................................................101
   Concept Studio: Conceptualizing Artmaking...........................104
      Instructional Interlude................................................106
   Conceptual Change Agents.................................................107
      Instructional Interlude................................................109
5. CASE PORTRAIT #2: THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Contemporary Curriculum in Context
- Learning in The Loop........................................115
  Instructional Interlude.....................................117
- A Wealth of Resources........................................118
  Instructional Interlude.....................................120
  Instructional Interlude.....................................120
  Institutional Interdisciplinary Initiative............121

Catalysts of Change
- Mark-making in the 21sts century........................124
- Inspiring Leadership........................................125
  Instructional Interlude.....................................129

Considering Current Curriculum
- Research Studio: Generating Inspiration ...............130
  Instructional Interlude.....................................132
  Instructional Interlude.....................................134
- Core Studio Practice: Aiming for Interdisciplinary Introductions....135
  Structuring Inter-disciplinary Objectives............141
  Instructional Interlude.....................................142
  Instructional Interlude.....................................144
- Core or Cram..................................................145

Conclusion: Living with Questions.................................147

6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Compare & Share....................................................149

Brave New Basics: A Rough Sketch..............................150
- Art is always about something............................151
- Context is critical............................................153
- Utrecht® is not the only place to buy art supplies......155
- Question authority and own your vision.....................157
- Play well with others........................................159

Implications for Postsecondary Art Education...............160
- Focus on Foundations..........................................161
- Promote Pedagogy.............................................163
  Enact relationships between theory and artmaking......165
  Facilitate critiques, don’t just schedule them.........168
  Don’t abandon learning by making........................171

Plug In...............................................................173

Future Research...................................................175

History in the Making...........................................175
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of introductory courses required in the first and second years of the BFA program at Carnegie Mellon University</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Comparison of credit hour distributions in The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s First Year Program in the 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 academic years</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The flow of students through Surface, Space, Time, and Concluding rotations in Core Studio Practice, one of two courses that comprise the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why Study Innovations in Undergraduate Studio Art Foundations?

College students interested in studying art in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, have a wide range of institutions to choose from. Various independent colleges of art and design, land grant and research universities, liberal arts and community colleges, and distance learning initiatives offer programs in art. In each case, the overarching contexts, missions, and organizing structures of these institutions influence what counts as art and art education. In some schools, curricular content is oriented towards production and interpretation of fine art while others emphasize preparation for work in commercial art worlds. Despite these differences, however, most undergraduate visual art programs require students to complete some set of introductory courses commonly referred to as foundations.

The architectural metaphor inherent in the term foundations is intentional. Such courses are designed to introduce basic skills and concepts as a support structure on which students can build advanced artistic practices. As one instructor matter-of-factly proclaimed: “Foundations are called that because that's what they are: basic training for the eye and hand” (Bannard, 2005, ¶25). By the late 20th century, such training typically included beginning courses in drawing, color theory, and 2- and 3-dimensional design.
(Betz, 2003; Dockery & Quinn, 2007; Kaprow, 1964). Assuming what is basic is also universal, beginning art students are often required to complete the same set of foundation courses regardless of their prior knowledge and experience, their desire to create fine or applied art forms, or their interests in analog or digital media.

While one might interpret “training for the eye and hand” as more than biological or technical attunement, for those preparing art students to “imagine themselves as citizens within the world – not only the art world” (Becker, 1995/2000, p. 239) these objectives may seem limited and vague. Where, for example, does knowledge of historical and social context or cultural traditions fit into the traditional foundations curriculum? When are questions about the nature and purpose of art, artistic commitment, and professional responsibility introduced? I designed and conducted *Brave New Basics: Case Portraits of Innovation in Undergraduate Studio Art Foundations Curriculum* to explore alternative foundations curricula that might offer students more comprehensive preparation for life and work as contemporary artists.

**Background**

Most seem to agree that “[e]very student now pursuing a ‘foundation course’ at an art school has the Bauhaus to thank for it” (Whitford, 1984, p. 10). Johannes Itten, a Swiss artist and educator, created the first rationale and curriculum for the introductory *Vorkurs* course at the well-known, but relatively short-lived, Bauhaus school of art and architecture in Germany (1919-1933). His goals and objectives were based largely on his training as an elementary school teacher and follower of an Eastern theological tradition called Mazdaznan. As an elementary educator, Itten was trained in theories of constructive play popularized by Friedrich Froebel. As a spiritual man, he strove to
uncover and manipulate the essential nature and communicative power of materials and processes. “As a teacher he believed that everyone was innately creative and that Mazdaaznan could provide the key to unlock their natural artistic talent,” (Whitford, 1984, p. 54). Bauhaus students and supporters welcomed Itten’s celebration of individually variable solutions. They did so, however, in relation to the newly established, democratic Weimar Republic (Goldstein, 1996). “Whether or not students chose to subordinate their art to a manifest social role, they were not to think of themselves as divorced from society but as integral to it” (Rogal, 1998, p. 15).

Vorkurs has been translated alternately as preliminary or basic. While these concepts are not mutually exclusive, they are also not purely synonymous. In the case of Vokurs, preliminary would imply something that came before and led to something else whereas basic would have referred to some essential content and experience. Similarly, foundations are alternately referred to as introductory or core courses and curricula. While foundations and core suggest a stable body of knowledge to be mastered, introductory does not necessarily presume universal content or complete understanding. These subtly different terms demonstrate the role of course titles as rhetorical devices and indicators of goals and objectives in curriculum design. Throughout this dissertation I substitute the term introductory for foundations whenever possible to encourage rethinking of the goals and purposes of beginning art courses.

Because the Bauhaus preliminary course is so often identified as the inspiration for the standard foundations curriculum, it is important to acknowledge that that course was a perpetual work in process rather than a calcified model. Instructors interpreted its goals and objectives to reflect their own artistic and pedagogical values and practices
(Efland, 1990; Franciscono, 1971; Whitford, 1984). In other words, even at the Bauhaus, opinions varied on what constituted fundamental artistic knowledge, how such skills and concepts could be taught, and what ends the preliminary course was intended to serve.

Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius did not include plans for a preliminary course in his initial proposals for the school. Once hired, Itten developed Vokurs as a six-month preliminary, trial period for both the student and school to see how well their philosophies about art fit with one another. He developed exercises to challenge students’ to unlock, explore, and trust their innate artmaking capabilities. Later Vorkurs instructors, including Joseph Albers and Paul Klee, reimagined the course primarily as an introduction to the basic visual concepts they deemed necessary for students’ future work.

When the Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, many of the school’s faculty immigrated to the United States. Based on the international reputation of the Bauhaus its instructors found new positions in established colleges and universities like Harvard and Yale or contributed to the establishment of new institutions like Black Mountain College in North Carolina. László Moholy-Nagy, for example, took a job at the New Bauhaus-American School of Design in Chicago. As part of his effort to “reorient [the school’s] pedagogical program to bring it more in line with the priorities of Chicago’s skeptical businessmen” (Findeli, 1995, p. 6), Moholy-Nagy first used the term foundations to describe the introductory curriculum. Foundations implied a stable body of knowledge that could support the goals of standardization and efficiency required by the Association of Arts and Industry, which sponsored the school.
At other schools, the introduction of a fundamental body of knowledge aligned with the goals of comprehensive colleges and universities. As Pevsner (1973) suggested, without understanding the history of scientific academies, “many features characteristic of art academies at various moments cannot be fully understood” (p. 14). Following this proposal, Singerman (1999) observed that degree-granting institutions demand “...a reproducible and certifiable knowledge – a language at once theoretical and esoteric – on which to found and consolidate the exclusivity of a discipline or profession and to guarantee its members’ status as experts” (p. 156). The quasi-scientific nature of Bauhaus “visual science” (Whitford & Cave, 2004) illustrated by preliminary course exercises enabled artist-teachers to meet the curricular demands of colleges and universities in the United States. No longer would artistic practice be understood simply as objectively technical or subjectively expressive. Artists would be expected to know and follow guidelines like their colleagues in other disciplines.

While introductory 2-D and 3-D art and design courses are attributed to the Bauhaus, beginning drawing courses are not. Rather, observation and perspective drawing lessons are considered the legacy of a less frequently noted but similarly important influence on foundations, the European Art Academy. From their humble beginnings, the first art academies presented drawing as the primary foundation for artistic practice. The program at the first art academy, Vasari’s Academia del Disegno (established in 1563 in Florence, Italy) was built around the practice of drawing as an *intellectual* as well as a technical endeavor. Vasari held disegno, commonly translated as
drawing but intended to refer to full expression of ideas and judgments held in the artist’s mind rather than objective representations of the perceived world, as the “common foundation of all the visual arts” (Goldstein, 1996, p. 14).

Vasari’s model influenced the development of countless other academies including those in Rome (est. 1577) and Paris (est. 1648). The mission of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was to “provide for the teaching of art as a liberal discipline” (Goldstein, 1996, p. 41) not just a vocation. Students spent years, however, developing technical drawing skills sketching antique casts, copying Renaissance and contemporary engravings, and recording the contours of nude models. The school’s founders planned a series of lectures in geometry, perspective, music, astronomy, anatomy, history and poetry to supplement technical instruction. They believed theories from these areas would help students explicate the language of art, the ability of accumulated lines and colors to signify the illusion of space or an emotional state, in which artists were expected to be fluent. In their efforts to introduce these concepts, faculty developed instructional strategies including gallery talks and studio critiques of works in progress still in use today.

Statement of the Issue

Academy training was the primary education available to visual artists in the United States in the early 20th century. Drawing remained the fundamental mode of learning to make art in these schools. By mid-century, however, teaching-artists working to integrate studio art programs into comprehensive colleges and universities in the U.S. embraced the theoretical nature of art education promoted at the Bauhaus. The economy of form represented by the Bauhaus’s International Style complimented modern
developments in abstract painting and sculpture in which painters and sculptors strove to produce works devoid of specific reference to anything beyond the work itself.

Following Clive Bell (1913) and Clement Greenberg’s (1939) formalist theories of “significant form” and “pure” art, and echoing the work of other, more traditionally recognized researchers, they devised formal- and material-bound experiments in pursuit of *art for art’s sake*. These abstract and relatively theoretical works helped artists establish their place within modern universities as artist-teacher-scholars.

Over time, artists began to rebel against the detached modernist emphasis on the formal properties of works of art (Gablik, 1984; Heartney, 2001). Supported by the development of critical cultural studies and working under related, transdisciplinary labels like Feminist, Performance, and Conceptual art, postmodern artists representing the New Left like Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Felix Gonzales-Torres reengaged the world outside their studios and created new processes for addressing their artistic and social concerns. Steven Durland (1998) described this transition in his introduction to *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena*:

> Artists had an overwhelming sense that they no longer had to separate the task of creating art from the social issues that had an impact on the rest of their lives, and for many, a sense that the content was the most important aspect of the art. (p. xxii)

In other words, some artists were no longer content making objects of and about art. Rather, they sought “art beyond art’s sake” (Pietaro, 2003). Such work raised questions about how artists should be educated that remain open to debate today.
Currently, art educators at all levels are divided on what they should teach at the introductory level. Following a tour of art schools and university art departments in preparation for an article on the state of Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs for ArtNews, Gregg (2003) noted countless challenges have art-school faculties reexamining their mission and values. The proliferation of programs and students; the embrace of diverse art forms and content; the professionalization of art practice; the rise of cultural theory; whether (and how) to teach specific artisinal skills; and even the very definition of art have inspired many a debate in art-school conference rooms around the nation. (p. 106)

Voices in these debates cover a range of perspectives from technical to conceptual and reflect artistic values, beliefs, and practices in addition to changes in the patterns and possibilities of artmaking within the culture-at-large. Some believe that all artists and designers rely on fundamental formal principles thought to comprise a universal visual language in which all beginning art students should become fluent (Fendrich, 2005; Lavender, 2003; Stewart, 2004). Others wonder if it is possible, given the diversity of contemporary artistic practices, purposes, and contexts that I discuss in the next chapter, to define a single set of commonly employed concepts (Ackerman & Mahoney, 1970; Gude, 2000; Kleinfelder, 2004).

There is ample room in the system of postsecondary art programs for traditional and more exploratory curricula. Regardless of where a particular program lies along this spectrum, however, it is important that the artistic and educational philosophies that drive
that program are clearly articulated and represented in mission statements and promotional materials. This may help avoid situations where faculty and students are surprised or disappointed by the courses they are asked to teach or to take.

Generally, introductory undergraduate studio art curricula and mission statements can be placed in three main categories: 1) traditional - some combination of courses in drawing, color theory, and 2- and 3-dimensional design; 2) modified - maintain some traditionally defined foundations courses with additional thematic or new media courses; and 3) reconstructive – organized around themes and experimental processes. The programs at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), described at length in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation, fall somewhere between modified and reconstructive. Both schools strive to encourage modes of thinking and making that blur distinctions between, rather than adhere to, distinct artistic disciplines. However, neither rejects responsibility for introducing students to formal and technical artistic concepts.

Statement of Purpose

I designed *Brave New Basics* to explore innovations in introductory undergraduate studio art foundations curriculum. Arthur Levine (1980) identified educational innovations as *new* and *different*. He wrote: “Innovation combines the elements of reform and change; *reform* implying new and *change* implying different. *Innovation* can operationally be defined as any departure from the traditional practices of an organization” (p. 3). Note that Levine’s definition of innovation is not judgmental. It merely implies a deviation from convention. Likewise, mine was not an evaluative study. My goal was interpretive description, not judgment.
After preliminary reviews of the introductory visual art curricula at various schools, I elected Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago for further, in-depth investigation. According to information I gleaned from their websites and heard from teaching-artists these programs seemed innovative. In this dissertation I present “portraits” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) of these programs based on my observations of classroom practices, reviews of teaching materials, and discussions with faculty and students. My goal in designing the study was to explore and describe not only the structures and related practices of teaching and learning at these schools, but also the experiences and responses of faculty and students about these practices. I hope readers, presumably faculty and students at other institutions, will find these examples useful in examining their own beliefs and assumptions about introductory postsecondary visual art education, not necessarily as models for emulation.

Significance of the Study

In most undergraduate visual art programs, including The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, introductory course requirements consume a majority of first year art students’ time. In other programs, like Carnegie Mellon University, required core courses extend through the second year. These courses aim to provide a basis for students’ subsequent work in school and beyond. The mission for foundation studies at one large Midwestern university, for example, states: “Our ultimate goal is to ‘open eyes’ and minds, enabling our students to get the most out of their future studies.” Such lofty rhetoric, coupled with the time required for these courses, suggests that they are a significant component of postsecondary art education worthy and necessary of concentrated and sustained study.
Administrators and faculty, however, often treat introductory courses as necessary but less significant than advanced, elective studio courses. One commonly mentioned indication of their inferior status is the fact that foundations courses are often taught by graduate students and adjunct instructors rather than full-time professors (Gould, 2001; Northrup, 2001). Others note their absence from the accreditation protocol for the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). NASAD’s annual handbook provides standards for curricula in a wide range of disciplines from jewelry making to video production. Through the 2007-2008 edition, however, the authors offered no particular direction for foundations program coordinators. Since the summer of 2005, a group of Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE) members has been working on preliminary guidelines for foundation curricula and facilities for proposed adoption by NASAD. Such guidelines reflect the increasing recognition of introductory programs administered as distinct entities of art schools and departments.

Until NASAD adopts specific standards for introductory curriculum, its general guidelines for “All Undergraduate Professional Degree Programs in the Visual Arts and Design” might be used to direct those interested in foundations evaluation and reform. These include: “technical competence, broad knowledge of art/design and art/design history, an understanding of style and its implications, critical thinking, an insight into the role of art and design in the life of humankind, and the ability to identify and solve problems” (NASAD, 2007, p. 79). NASAD’s silence on introductory art courses and their particular role in the undergraduate curriculum, however, epitomize the lack of resources created specifically for foundations curriculum planners.
Designing this study, I wondered how this lack of attention might affect faculty and students’ attitudes towards introductory courses. If undergraduate students are expected to devote their first year or two of school to foundations coursework, shouldn’t the goals and objectives of such courses be thoroughly considered, carefully planned, and continually evaluated and revised? *Brave New Basics* contributes to the literature on postsecondary art education providing descriptions of foundations programs and related faculty and student perspectives about art education.

James Elkins (2001) observed that, since the Bauhaus, little has been documented on the theory and practice of teaching art at the postsecondary level. He noted, “Teachers at the Bauhaus made statements and wrote pamphlets, lecture notes, and books. Several students wrote about their experiences. That, more than any single factor, accounts for the importance the Bauhaus continues to have” (p. 37). Elkins suggested that the dearth of documentation on recent teaching and learning gives the impression that little has changed or that change from the Bauhaus paradigm is unnecessary.

While I agree with Elkins that research on undergraduate art education is limited, conferences and journals devoted to the subject provide evidence that change is actively being debated. Much of this discussion has transpired within the realm of the professional organization Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE). FATE was established in 1977 as an affiliate of the College Art Association (CAA). FATE sponsors a range of unique professional development opportunities for postsecondary studio art instructors including panels at national and regional CAA conferences, a biennial conference, and an annual journal titled *FATE in Review*. 
A panel at the 2005 FATE biennial conference (Columbus, OH) entitled “The Natives Are Restless: The Pioneering Work of Foundations Coordinators” presented a new breed of postsecondary art education administrators whose very existence suggests a shifting attitude towards introductory courses. Presenters suggested the number of programs that employ a foundations coordinator or director has grown over the past decade. Often these positions are filled by relatively recent MFA graduates who are hired for their youthful energy, presumably a prerequisite for a job which includes administering programs staffed by itinerant workers, absorbing criticism from veteran faculty, and responding to the complaints of students who would rather be taking elective courses (Stewart, 2006). Coordinators on the panel described issues they confronted and strategies they employed in attempting to revise the programs they inherited. Lee Ann Garrison of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, for example, described a yearlong, theme-driven curriculum she and her faculty devised to create a sense of community amongst new students and their professors. The standing room only audience at this panel demonstrated a hunger amongst foundations instructors for case studies of innovative programs such as those I present in this dissertation.

Just one month before this presentation, FATE sponsored a session at the 2005 College Art Association convention titled “The Emperor’s New Clothes: or Are the Recent Developments in Foundations Art Curricula as Silly as They Seem?” Panel chair Brian Curtis asked, “Is there something of value being lost in the mad scramble to position ourselves at the cutting edge of technology and academic fashion?” While the abstract evoked skepticism, at least one panelist noted hesitancy in making judgments of non-traditional programs because:
It is not easy to find out specifically what is being done to foundation study in the name of Postmodernism, because the available descriptions are so excruciating, nonspecific and jargonized that it is impossible to tell what actually goes on in the classroom. I have had to rely on acquaintances and web sources and anecdotal evidence for specific information. (Bannard, 2005)

Although their artistic and pedagogical philosophies may differ, individuals situated all along the technical-conceptual spectrum seem interested in obtaining more detailed descriptions of introductory curricula that depart from tradition.

**Guiding Questions**

Two primary objectives guided my investigations of introductory studio art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. First, I wanted to get a better understanding of, and expand upon available course descriptions that seemed to diverge from tradition. Second, I wanted to get a sense of faculty and student experiences of and responses to teaching and learning in these institutional and curricular contexts. The following questions helped focus my investigations to meet these objectives:

1. What concepts and skills constitute the foundations of artistic practice introduced at these schools?

2. What values, beliefs and assumptions about art and education inform these programs?
3. How did these curricula come to be? What conditions make these programs viable?

4. What might others learn from the experiences of faculty and students in these programs?

**Overview of Research Design**

A more detailed and thorough discussion of the research methodologies and methods I employed for this dissertation appears in Chapter 3. The following is a basic overview of the two qualitative research methodologies that guided my work. First, I organized my investigations of introductory visual art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago as individual case studies. According to Merriam (2001), “a descriptive case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study….they are useful in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (p. 38). Merriam’s suggestion that descriptive case studies provide bases and direction for future research supported my efforts to describe each program, in context. At first a seemingly simple task, documenting the complexity of teaching and learning in each program proved a great challenge.

I used Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) methods and related theories of social science “portraiture” to refine my approach to descriptive case study inquiry and help me think through issues of representation and documentation. Portraiture acknowledges the active role of the researcher in constructing observations and representations of subjects. Like visual artists, the social science portrait writer moves back and forth between empirical observation and expressive interpretation. Throughout my work, I focused
equally on collecting, summarizing, and synthesizing data in order to produce coherent portraits in addition to developing direction for later investigations. Knowing my ability to represent events and experiences is necessarily subjective, and therefore partial and limited, I aimed to produce layered descriptions of each program that evoked the dynamic and diverse ways they were experienced and described by faculty, students, and myself. At various times during the project, I felt the “crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving and shaping, reflecting and imposing, mirroring and improvising” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12).

Limitations of the Study

I chose Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago for this study because their approaches to introductory undergraduate studio art education seemed innovative. What I did not plan for was just how different these programs, their institutional contexts, and faculty and student attitudes, beliefs, and expectations for art and art education are from so many schools across the United States. I was reminded of this during the 2007 FATE conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The majority of participants at that gathering spoke from the perspective of land grant institutions and community colleges. The private and independent top-ranked schools I elected to study are highly selective, draw students from all over the world, and have more opportunities and license to be innovative given their geographic and institutional contexts. While I always planned this study to provide descriptions and ideas for how foundations of art might be reconceived, both conceptually and pedagogically, I am constantly reminded of just how different the circumstances of many schools are from those I studied. I want to reiterate, therefore, that I am not unilaterally endorsing or
trying to encourage readers to adopt elements of the curricula described in this dissertation without consideration of the particularities of their own institutions.

In addition, this dissertation focused on introductory studio art courses. It should be noted, however, that art history, art criticism, and liberal arts courses are essential and sometimes contentious components of undergraduate introductory curricula. Developments in art history that emphasize contextual analysis in regard to the production and interpretation of artworks are inspiring change to the traditional, introductory survey courses that should be explored in relation to changes in postmodern artmaking practices and education. I limited this study, however, to innovations in studio art curriculum and instruction.

Finally, research in the field of art education has primarily focused on K-12 settings. Some instructors make distinctions between art and artist education, the former being education about art for children and novices, the latter professional preparation for practicing artists. Such distinctions discount the parallel artistic and pedagogical interests and concerns of K-12 and postsecondary instructors. As Edmund B. Feldman (1970) noted: “It would be most unwise for art educators to work for the aesthetic development of grade school children exclusively, and to ignore what becomes of them afterward so far as their commerce with the visual arts is concerned” (p. 1). Such disregard ignores the responsibility of secondary and postsecondary art educators to help students make the transition between these learning contexts. And, finally, it ignores the fact that pre-service elementary, middle, and secondary art educators take postsecondary level studio
art courses, starting with introductory courses, as part of their training. While these issues are beyond the specific focus of this study, the results of this study could inform future research in art education related to these issues.

Conclusion: Overview of Chapters

This chapter provided a general context and overview of my studies of the innovative introductory studio art curricula in use at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In the next chapter, I provide my conceptual framework for the study through a discussion of contemporary art practices and critical pedagogy. As promised, in the third chapter, I present a more detailed discussion of my research methodology. My case portraits of each program comprise the fourth and fifth chapters. In the sixth and final chapter I offer my comparative discussion of these programs with potential implications for curriculum planners and instructors and recommendations for researchers interested in furthering this line of inquiry.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH CONTEXT

Framing Portraits of Innovative Undergraduate Introductory Studio Art Curricula

Some portraits are well suited by traditional, rectangular frames—ornately carved wood or plain metal boxes, custom-designed or recycled. Regardless of their material make-up, these frames isolate the images they house. Other representations blend seamlessly into the natural frames, or contexts, in which they appear. Like their artistic counterparts, the frames in which social science portraits are read can effect their interpretation. These are conceptual frames, constructed out of ideas rather than physical materials. In this chapter, I present a conceptual framework for the portraits of innovative undergraduate introductory studio art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago I present in Chapters 4 & 5.

Since the first apprenticeship, artists have debated and experimented with various ways to educate other artists. My goal in this chapter is not to summarize that history. For such reports I recommend Pevsner’s (1973) Academies of Art, Past and Present, Morrison’s (1973) The Rise of the Arts on the American Campus, Goldstein’s (1996) Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers, Funk’s (1990) The Development of Professional Studio Art Training in American Higher Education, 1860-

To develop this conceptual framework I reviewed personal experiences, thought experiments, and existing literature that led me to this study (Maxwell, 1996). My interest in innovative undergraduate introductory studio art curriculum initially stemmed from knowledge and experiences I obtained before I began my doctoral studies. My social action-oriented Jewish upbringing, undergraduate liberal arts education, experience working in a contemporary art gallery in New York City, time as a high school art educator, and broad interests in fine and popular forms of art and culture inspired my initial questions about postsecondary contemporary art education. This organically woven web of influences led me to notice things and ask questions that other art educators might not have. I explicitly expanded upon my observations and sought responses to my emerging questions through thought experiments developed in journal entries and cocktail party conversations, research papers for graduate courses, and conference presentations.

Wolcott (2001) called on researchers to “make better use of our own earlier studies in interpreting our later ones, to make our individual efforts cumulative over time” (p. 82). Reviewing research papers I wrote for graduate courses at The Ohio State University, I was able to trace my emerging interests in interdisciplinary studies, education for social justice and action, collaborative and instrumental art forms and processes, critical pedagogy, visual culture, and the role of artists in society. The
following are a few examples of those studies: “Liberal Arts and the Arts: A Search for Meaning and Purpose” (Kushins, 2003), “The Enduring Spirit of Social Reconstruction in Education and Art” (Kushins, 2004) “The (Un)Becoming of a Critical Visual Art Educator: A Hyper-textual Exploration” (Kushins, 2004) and “Recognizing Artists as Public Intellectuals: A Pedagogical Imperative” (Kushins, 2005). These papers include references to my own experiences as an art student and educator, cultural artifacts and happenings, articles in academic journals and mass media, and postsecondary level art program mission statements and course descriptions. The opportunity to creatively combine disparate sources of data in new ways, as in a visual collage, is one of the things I find attractive about doing qualitative research.

Like the teaching-artists I spoke to and whose work I read throughout my research, my own thought experiments emphasized developments in contemporary, or postmodern, artmaking as rationale for curricular change. Few of the instructors I spoke with explicitly noted pedagogical reasons for changing the curriculum though all expressed concern and compassion for students’ needs and interests. This may not be terribly surprising given that most of these individuals were trained as studio artists, not educators. Practical and theoretical research published in general and art education literature, however, may prove helpful in understanding and justifying their calls for revising foundations curriculum.

To this end, I discuss postmodern artmaking and critical pedagogy in this chapter. Taken together, theories and practices in these areas clarify and illuminate goals and objectives found in calls for postmodern art education (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr,1996), critical art pedagogy (Cary, 1998), and visual culture education (Freedman, 2003). In the
final section of this chapter, I present characteristics of these critical approaches to teaching and learning in the arts to form the edges of a framework for my investigations of 21st century art foundations reform.

Postmodernism:

A Revitalized Context for Creation and Curriculum

Contemporary is a broad term that has been loosely applied to art created over the last few decades. Defined as “happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time” (Meriam-Webster, 2006-2007), contemporary has been used simply to identify recent works of art as well as works that reflect the times in which they were created through their form or content. Although most of the participants in my study referred to contemporary artmaking practices as rationale for innovations in their curricula, I grounded the following discussion of art since the 1960s in the language of postmodern art and practice. I am not alone in using the terms postmodern and contemporary interchangeably in describing recent art and culture. The first chapter in an anthology titled Themes in Contemporary Art (Perry & Wood, 2004), for example, introduces “postmodernist,” rather than contemporary art.

Although postmodernism is a highly contended and elusive concept, I find it helpful in describing the artistic context which gave rise to innovations in undergraduate introductory studio art curriculum. In addition to its general usefulness in describing changes in artmaking practices, characteristics of postmodern artmaking parallel and help illustrate theories of critical pedagogy I will address in the next part of this chapter. Indeed, the postmodern artists I’m most interested in, those whose work inspired me to
conduct this study, could be described as critical pedagogues who use their work to draw public interest to issues and events (Becker, 1999; Giroux, 1988; Kushins, 2006; Said, 1994).

Jameson (1998) described postmodernism as a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order—what is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism. (p. 3)

While such holistic analyses of art and society could and should be applied to the study of any era, Jameson used postmodernism to describe a particular relationship between capitalism and cultural production in U.S. arts and culture in the second half of the twentieth century. In the past five decades, technological and social developments have reordered and expanded opportunities and avenues for political, intellectual, and economic innovation. These changes have had a similar impact on artistic enterprises. Jameson (1998) described characteristics of postmodern projects that are helpful in highlighting relationships between contemporary art and postsecondary art education reform. In the following sections I describe developments in postmodern artmaking using two of Jameson’s (1998) observations about postmodern projects as organizing concepts.

Post-Modernism

First, Jameson (1998) observed that postmodern works constitute reactions to high modernist conclusions. Similarly, Heartney (2001) defined postmodern art as a
“revolution against modernist faith in universality, artistic progress, shared meaning, and quality” (p. 12). In other words, postmodern art challenges the notion that there is any single definition of good or meaningful art. Feminist art historians Orton & Pollock (cited in Harris, 2001), for example, challenge the “institutionally dominant art history” (p. 8) represented by the canon which tracks formal and stylistic progression from the Parthenon to Picasso to Post-Painterly Abstraction through works made mostly by white men. Deconstructing conclusive definitions of art determined by Western scholars and art collectors opens space to legitimate a wider range of art and artists as members of contemporary artworlds. As Barrett (1997) observed, “Postmodernists do not merely follow modernists chronologically, they critique them” (p. 27). Such critique is a primary characteristic of critical pedagogy as well as postmodern art.

Late modern artists working in the 1950s and 1960s under the banners of Color Field Painting and Post-Painterly Abstraction explored the formal limits of materials and composition to emphasize the visual effect of artworks, primarily paintings, over expressive, instrumental, or functional content and purposes. As Suzi Gablik (1991) observed, “Modernism, above all, exalted the complete autonomy of art, and the gesture of severing bonds with society” (p. 5). Modern formalism attempted to position art as an objective enterprise akin to scientific studies. Because this was the prevailing goal of artmaking in the institutional artworld during the greatest expansion of postsecondary art education in the U.S., many curricula were designed to reflect formal ideals. Indeed, some have suggested that the objective criteria used to evaluate developments in modern abstraction proposed by Clement Greenberg and others, enabled art to gain a footing in land grant and research universities (Risatti, 1993; Singerman, 1999).
Artists who came of age and were educated amidst the social, political, and environmental turbulence of the 1960s and 70s were not content to work in isolation on works devoid of references to their knowledge and experiences outside the world of art. Looking to Marcel Duchamp for inspiration, they advanced non-medium-specific modes of making including Conceptual, Performance, and Feminist art. These artists appropriated materials and actions from the real world like bouncing balls (Bruce Nauman), digging holes (Chris Burden), and cleaning (Martha Rosler) as media for their commentaries on art and society. In these works, the selection of media was a critical aspect of the production of meaning in the work, not merely a reflection of an artist’s training.

In the exhibition Work Ethic, Molesworth (2003) positioned these efforts in relation to shifts in the U.S. economy from manufacturing to service and later information industries. In the catalogue she wrote:

By the second half of the twentieth century, artists consistently explored the limits of what could be considered legitimate artistic labor. They did so in large measure by turning away from traditional media such as painting and sculpture, finding them too static, too commodifiable, and too emblematic of traditional elite culture. (p. 17)

Not only were postmodern artists no longer bound to use traditional art materials, they no longer had to make anything. Drawing realistically or constructing an original object were no longer prerequisites for artmaking. Singerman (1999) recalled how this shift affected his own experiences in art school in the 1970s.
It was clear to us that something historical was at stake in the name we took.
Long after our one visiting artist, a painter from New York, had departed,
discussion continued about his insistence on identifying himself as a painter rather
than an artist. The labels proposed different objects and different questions
concerning what was to be done: a critical art practice after Duchamp, on the one
hand, and a history of painting descended from Cézanne, on the other. (p. 2)

By the 2002 Whitney Biennial, an event which has served as a barometer of artistic
activity in the U.S. since 1932, the result of this resistance and experimentation was an
eclectic, pluralistic artworld with no prevailing orthodoxy (Rinder, 2002). As Wilson
(2003) suggested, this complexity extends possibilities for artmaking but creates
challenges for art educators attempting to chart the content of the field.

While explicitly invested in challenging formal emphases in modern art and
culture, postmodern artists do not ignore the expressive quality of their formal choices.
In order to sustain audience attention, like the best artists in any era including their
modernist predecessors who created insular visual theses on the nature of art, postmodern
artists must provide viewers with work that is visually stimulating and intellectually,
emotionally, or functionally compelling. In such work, form and subject seamlessly
merge into “a coherent sum of parts” (Kaprow, 1963/64, p. 138). Artists like Shazia
Sikander, Chris Ofili and Faith Ringgold, for example, appropriate artmaking materials
and techniques from their ethnic cultures of origin, rewriting the rules for their use and,
as such, their meaning.
Blurry Boundaries

Jameson’s (1998) second observation about postmodern projects was that they do not tend to fit neatly within and often blur the boundaries of previously defined categories. Modern institutions excelled at creating divisions between and standardizing operations and ideas. Schools and universities were no exception. Departmental distinctions ignored relationships between areas of knowledge and emphasized the theoretical knowledge of experts over the practical knowledge of local and ethnic communities. Divisions within the arts that date back to the Renaissance fit neatly into the ivory tower’s modern era strategic plans. As a result, the visual, literary, and performing arts are often treated as disparate areas of knowledge. In these systems, artificial distinctions between art and design; high art and lower forms of visual culture including religious, ethnic, and commercial arts; and between those who create and interpret such works led artists to specialize in, for example, painting, sculpture, photography, or graphic design.

Since the 1960s, culture has become a trans-disciplinary organizing focus of studies in the arts, humanities, and social sciences that offers promise for attending to multiple forms of knowledge and experience. Dikovitskaya (2005) described this cultural turn as a revisionist project in which the previous paradigm, based on a belief in the objective nature of social scientific inquiry, [was] subsequently displaced by a standpoint that reveals culture—a representational, symbolic, and linguistic system—to be an instigator of social, economic, and political forces and processes rather than a mere reflection of them (p. 48).
A wide range of cultural studies—women’s, black, American, Jewish, Islamic, and visual culture—supports this new paradigm. Since first introduced in the 1960s, scholars in these fields have grown increasing adept at combining content, theories, methods derived from sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, literature, art history, education, and other traditionally disparate academic disciplines. In so doing, they attempt to describe and interpret the complexity of cultural phenomena including the individual and collective production and use of objects, images, and events.

Some postmodern artists approach their work as a form of cultural study and production. Their work cannot be categorized by form, style, or purpose. Nikki S. Lee’s explorations of U.S. sub-cultures (1997 - present), for example, invite simultaneous interpretations as anthropological performances that result in sociological evidence and fictionalized narratives. They blur previously erected boundaries between anthropology and art. To examine them as simply one or the other would miss their point. Joseph Kosuth’s One and Three Chairs (1965), James Turrell’s Roden Crater (1972-present), James Luna’s Artifact Piece (1987), and The Names Project also known as the AIDS Memorial Quilt (1987-present), offer further illustrations of trans-disciplinary, non-media-specific contemporary art projects.

These works are not purely visual. Rather, they illustrate Adler’s (1979) observation that: “the arts now draw so much upon other branches of knowledge that it is no longer sufficient for an artist to be simply a good craftsman” (p. 16). Danto (2005) similarly observed:

Artists today are an especially serious group of what one ought properly to think of as visual thinkers. … If one looks at the art through the clarifying lens of the
ample wall texts—or listens through the headsets the museum distributes free of charge to what the artists themselves have to say about their own work—the evidence is overwhelming that most of the art has a certain high moral and intellectual purpose. (p. 21-22)

These comments beg the question: what should education for contemporary artmaking, or visual thinking, entail?

In response to postmodern modes of making, Risatti (1993) urged art educators to reconsider “their commitment to formalism as the core of studio art education as opposed to the liberal arts and sciences which correspond more closely to the concerns of new art” (p. 12). Decades earlier, Contant (in Matters 1963) suggested “Artists, no less than doctors, lawyers, and educators need a solid conceptual foundation [italics added] upon which to build their special expressive skills” (p. 58). His rationale is no less significant today:

Particularly at this frighteningly complex stage of history when rapid-fire changes are the order of the day, the artist needs a foundation in history, literature, anthropology and sociology; but he should also be well educated in drama, music, and dance. (p. 58)

Becker (1989) joined Risatti in carrying these calls into the twenty-first century. Critiquing the state of general education courses in independent art schools she wrote, “it is now time to take these academic programs one step further and offer students a truly rigorous core curriculum with courses in art history and in social, cultural, philosophical, and literary history taught in sequence” (p. B2). These scholars suggested that introducing students to areas of knowledge and modes of inquiry outside the arts, and
providing them with the tools to connect that learning to their work in the studio are necessary foundations for art-making in the postmodern era. Some might argue this is not the responsibility of those educating artists (Hickey in Rubenstein, 2007; Matter, 1963). However, others would counter that artists who sustain practices over time build on a wide range of knowledge and interests.

Subcultural Considerations

The artists I have cited thus far are internationally recognized. Most were educated in schools like Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and they have gained access to the benefits of membership in the Art:21 (Sollins, 2001-2005) club. I suspect most readers will be familiar with their work, able to draw a mental image as they read, which is why I chose them as examples. However, particularly as I write about blurred distinctions between art forms and genres, it is important to note the role of self-taught and community-educated artists working tirelessly, in relative obscurity, who contribute to the contemporary artistic landscape. These artists present alternatives to the canon of art presented in typical modern art textbooks and curricula. As I discuss in the next section of this chapter, critical examinations of the modern “metanarrative” (Lyotard, 1979) of art history, including attention to the work of women and members of other subcultures in historical and contemporary contexts, are an essential characteristic of critical pedagogy.

Community centers (Passion Works), artists collectives (The Beehive Collective), prisons (Art Behind Bars), the streets (The Billboard Liberation Front), and cyberspace (MySpace.com) provide alternative venues for the exhibition of a wide-range of “cultural workers” (Giroux, 1992) who forefront their concomitant artistic, social, and economic
concerns and challenge previous notions of what art is and where it should be seen. These artists are not sitting around their studios waiting to be discovered by the curator of the international biennial. They are out in the world making and exhibiting their work. Faculty at schools of art and in university art departments should expose students to artists such as these whose work raises fundamental questions about the nature of art and related institutions, including schools.

Teaching students to think beyond modernist formal concerns, to mine their cultural contexts for inspiration, and cross presumed boundaries are chief objectives of postmodern art educators. In the following section I introduce theories of critical pedagogy that support such interests. In the final section of the chapter, I return to characteristics of postmodern art, outlining connections between these practices, guiding principles of critical pedagogy, and calls for 21st century art foundations reform.

Critical Pedagogy:
A Call for Radical Revisions

Many foundations instructors planning and executing curricular innovations to reflect postmodern artmaking consciously and unconsciously draw on theories of critical pedagogy. The term critical pedagogy has been attributed to educational theorist Henry Giroux (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). The roots of this theory, however, are firmly planted within earlier calls for education grounded in public life and social action or social reconstruction. John Dewey, Leo Vygotsky, George S. Counts, and Paulo Friere, for example, were earlier proponents of progressive educational practices.
Countless other scholars and teachers, including Neil Postman, Maxine Greene, Michael Apple, bell hooks, and Peter McLaren have participated in the interpretation and expansion of critical pedagogy.

Despite the range of individuals who have contributed thoughts on the subject, the basic tenants of critical pedagogy have remained relatively the same. Readers who substitute *art* for *school* in the following statements will notice connections between postmodern art and critical pedagogy. First, school and society are not disparate entities. Second, certain kinds of knowledge and modes of communication have traditionally been privileged in Western society and its schools. Critical pedagogues believe teachers *and* students have contributions to make in the creation of new understandings of knowledge and experience. Finally, critical thinking leads to the development of critical consciousness which enables individuals to challenge the status quo and work for more just and open conditions in school and society.

The following is a discussion of these characteristics of critical pedagogy. Others might describe the emphases of critical pedagogy differently or use alternate theorists to support their explanation. Mine is not meant as an exhaustive review of the theories and practices of critical pedagogy. Rather, my intention is to inform calls for art foundations curriculum change related to contemporary artmaking practices with pedagogical theory. In so doing, I hope to explicate and expand space for questions and research on undergraduate introductory art education including my own. I invite readers familiar with postmodern artmaking practices, including but not exclusively those mentioned in the first part of this chapter to draw their own parallels between these areas. I present my own connections in the final section of this chapter.
Rethinking Relationships Between School and Society

Like the socially-engaged and community-based contemporary artists cited earlier, critical postmodern educators challenge modern divisions between school and society. They challenge conservative educators and policy makers who accept preset, generalized, and universally applied standards for content and assessment. Instead, critical educators demand and work towards education tailored to address the cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic specificity of students’ lives in and out of school. They perceive the school as one site integrated within the larger world and argue that what students learn in school should be related to other parts of their lives. Critical pedagogues work to help students educate themselves through investigations that compliment the complex realities of lived experience rather than schooling them in predetermined objectives and outcomes.

In his review of major concepts associated with critical pedagogy, McLaren (2003) cited Giroux’s (1979) distinction between micro and macro learning objectives to explicate divisions between school and society and critical attempts to unite the two. Micro objectives include learning and memorizing names, dates, and other concrete data related to isolated topical studies. Alternately, macro objectives require students to connect specific ideas and actions to their larger social and political circumstances. Simultaneous attention to micro and macro objectives enables students to connect concrete and general knowledge to reach meaningful understandings of, and ultimately use, the subject under investigation. This also helps students see that knowledge is constructed in context, influenced by individuals’ ideologies and actions. Nothing is neutral or value-free including their own cultural contexts, influences, and worldviews.
McLaren (2003) cautioned against education focused solely on micro objectives. He suggested “Teachers often emphasize classroom management procedures, efficiency, and ‘how-to-do’ techniques that ultimately ignore an important question: ‘Why is this knowledge being taught in the first place?’” (p. 71). McLaren’s query challenges the assumption that what has traditionally been taught in the name of any discipline is universally necessary or adequate. It suggests related critical questions such as: how are educational standards determined and by whom? McLaren reminds educators, including those who teach introductory undergraduate studio art courses, to constantly revisit their curricula, to restate their teaching objectives, and to evaluate what knowledge and experiences students are taking away from their courses and to what ends.

Whose Knowledge is School Knowledge?

As mentioned, critical pedagogues posit that knowledge is socially constructed and, therefore, subjective rather than inevitable, objective, or value-free. This understanding is sometimes described as a rejection of positivism or faith in scientific knowledge and meta-narratives defined by disciplined experts. Foucault (1980) suggested that different types of knowledge are valued in different contexts and identified a relationship between knowledge and power within cultures. Citing Habermas (1971), McLaren (2003) outlined three basic types of knowledge—technical, practical, and emancipatory—helpful for understanding how knowledge is constructed in schools and society.

Technical or scientific knowledge can be understood in relation to Giroux’s aforementioned micro learning objectives and Friere’s (1970) “banking” model of education. Such knowledge is determined by experts and authorities and subsequently
“deposited” (Freire, 2003) by teachers into students. Such knowledge is believed to be measurable and quantifiable. Demonstrations of technical knowledge include, spelling words correctly, labeling countries on a world map, and recognizing the elements and principles of design in an artistic composition. Critical pedagogues challenge the comprehensiveness of such knowledge.

*Practical* knowledge is primarily obtained through observation, dialogue, and comparison. Such knowledge is qualitative and, therefore, not quantifiable. While such knowledge can be demonstrated and evaluated for application and analysis, passing a test is not the point of learning this kind of information. Planting and tending a garden, interviewing a community leader, or documenting a local event through a series of photographs are but a few demonstrations of practical knowledge. Learning in this area is active, may be collaboratively generated, need not take place in formal school settings, and is always under review. Welcoming practical forms of knowledge derived from folk histories and popular culture is one way critical pedagogues attempt to transform their classrooms from safe deposit vaults to construction sites.

*Emancipatory* knowledge is specifically critical, aimed at engaging individuals in analysis and critique of systems of knowledge and power. One such system is schooling itself. A teacher who values emancipatory knowledge might ask, for example, whose knowledge is represented in our textbooks and in my classroom? How can I make more room for other voices? Engaging such questions with students can create challenging situations for teachers. Critical pedagogues must be willing to support student inquires that question authority, including our own. As Cary (1998) suggested:
Critical pedagogy posits the classroom as a site where students and teachers can examine and question. Decentering the status quo can sometimes produce an uncomfortable classroom, a somewhat less than cozy place for politely discussing safe ideas within the schooling and art boundaries power interests draw. (p. 11)

Emancipatory knowledge is marked by awareness of and respect for the coexistence of multiple perspectives, and little narratives, rather than a single truth represented by one meta-narrative. Greene (1995) linked this aspect of emancipatory knowledge with imagination, creativity, and, thereby, art education. “Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions” (p. 3). Emancipatory thinking encourages students to question the commonsense order of things proposed and perpetuated by modern social and economic institutions.

Because it is viewed as stable and measurable, technical knowledge is often emphasized in schools. Some technical knowledge is, of course, necessary. Individuals living and working in the United States who do not learn to read and write in English, for example, face challenges to their participation in daily life and the democratic process. However, practical and emancipatory knowledge must also be represented in any curriculum that strives to be relevant, critical, and transformative. These “co-intentional” (Freire, 2003, p. 69) modes of inquiry and understanding provide opportunities for both teachers and students to serve as experts and learn together.

While the acquisition of practical and emancipatory knowledge is open-ended and dialogic, it demands structure. The teacher is still the primary facilitator of learning who
guides students towards questions, information, and investigations they might not otherwise approach. Project-based and thematic learning, in which students engage “big ideas” and “essential questions” (Jacobs, 1997; Walker, 2001) posed by their teachers, empowers students to take control of their own learning, demonstrating the development of critical consciousness.

**Cultivating Critical Consciousness**

Emancipatory knowledge suggests that the ability to make connections between school and society requires not only recognition of and attention to various forms and creators of knowledge, but also reflective thinking. In order for education to be meaningful and transformative its objectives should go beyond students’ absorption and memorization of content and lead to conscientization (Freire, 2003) or “awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover[y of] their own capacities to re-create them” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003), p. 15). Critical consciousness halts blind acceptance and complicity. It empowers individuals to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and create new representations of knowledge and experience.

Quoting Ernest Hemingway, Postman and Weingartner (1969) described critical consciousness as “crap detection.” They wrote:

Our intellectual history is a chronicle of the anguish and suffering of [people] who tried to help their contemporaries see that some part of their fondest beliefs were misconceptions, faulty assumptions, superstitions, and even outright lies. The mileposts along the road of our intellectual development signal those points at
which some person developed a new perspective, a new meaning, or a new metaphor. We have in mind a new education that would set out to cultivate just such people—experts at ‘crap detecting.’ (p. 3)

Crap detecting is a manifestation of the democratic principle that supports freedom to think and express opinions that dissent from those with institutional authority and power.

Critical consciousness might also be understood as a form of praxis, the interaction of theory and practice in service of reflective action (Freire, 2003). In the case of artists, praxis may be understood as an ability to explain why one makes what one does. In the postmodern era, when artists determine both the form and content of their work, when anything can be used as an art material and art can be about anything, this is essential. As Gregg (2003) noted: “Today’s graduates have to be able to talk the talk, to relate their work to the contemporary world and the historical canon” (p. 107). Art students may develop skills required for praxis by tracking the development of their work in sketchbooks and journals, in classroom critiques, and by writing artist statements.

Towards 21st century Art Foundations:

Enacting a Dynamic and Critical Praxis

Traditional undergraduate introductory studio art courses, organized around the elements of art and principles of design, reflect theories of art popularized over fifty years ago (Risatti, 1993; Singerman, 1999). Artistic, educational, and social theories and practices have changed since that time. Many have called for the structure and content of undergraduate art education to reflect these changes (Ackerman & Mahoney, 1970;
Becker, 1989; Jackson, 1999; Kaprow, 1963/64; Kleinfelder, 2004; Kuhn, 1984; Risatti, 1989). In this section, I thematically review some of these recommendations, grounded in characteristics of postmodern art and tenants of critical pedagogy.

Since the early twentieth century, art educators working in primary and secondary school settings have proposed socially reconstructive and progressive, critical approaches for teaching and learning. Various publications delineate these theories and practices including Winslow’s (1939) *The Integrated School Art Program*, McFee and Degee’s (1977) *Art, Culture, Environment: A Catalyst for Teaching*, Edward’s (1993) *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*, Freedman’s (2003) *Teaching Visual Culture: Curriculum, Aesthetics, and the Social Life of Art*, and Anderson and Milbrandt’s (2004) *Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art*. Each of these movements has attempted to make school-based art education more relevant to students’ lives in and out of schools — moving beyond isolated formal and technical exercises and “school art” (Efland, 1976) projects by fostering interpretive skills and encouraging reflective examinations of the worlds we inhabit and help create. Considered collectively, these individual efforts comprise the basis for a philosophy of critical art pedagogy (Cary, 1998) that aims to connect school and society, recognize various forms of artistic knowledge, and cultivate critical consciousness.

Cary (1998) described critical art pedagogy as “ways to engage art so as to promote critical consciousness” (p. 12). His primary concern was “embracing the postmodern concept of art’s value and meaning as socially contextualized and relational instead of autonomous” (p. 21). Instructors who adopt tenants of critical art pedagogy
challenge formal elements and principles of art and realistic drawing skills as all-inclusive foundations for artistic practice (Chen, 2003; Freedman, 1994; Jackson, 1998; Louder, 1997). They highlight vernacular and folk art forms like cartoons, quilts, and commercial products as sources of inspiration and models for making (Arrigo, 2004; Stuhr, 2000). Forefronting the relationship between works of art and the cultural contexts in which they are created, critical art educators often encourage students to respond to the social, political, and economic conditions of their lives through their work (Forde, 2003; Wittenbraker, 2003). They aim to link theoretical and technical investigations to help students develop a dynamic art praxis.

These beliefs and objectives are manifest in various trends found in revised undergraduate art foundations curricula including: thematic and non-media-specific course offerings; integrated lessons in studio techniques, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics; the incorporation of digital technologies; opportunities for collaboration; and attention to identity politics. I discuss these concepts in this section and return to them in the final chapter. Readers will note many overlaps between these ideas and the previous discussions on postmodern artmaking and critical pedagogy.

Many of the authors I cite in this section are foundations instructors who have published treatises, anecdotes, and research in FATE in Review, the annual journal published by Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE). As noted in the previous chapter, since the 1970s, FATE has served as the primary forum for discussion and debate of undergraduate studio art education at the introductory level. FATE in Review authors represent a wide range of institutions—art schools and universities big and small from across the country and abroad—and is a unique resource for those
interested in exploring variations on what is being taught in the name of foundations and rationale for such changes. The circulation of this journal, however, is restricted to members of the organization. I traveled to the University of Eastern Illinois to examine a complete set of archived volumes. In the future, I hope to see FATE increase circulation of this publication perhaps beginning with a thematic anthology of past articles. Access to these ideas would aid curriculum planners and instructors interested in the discourse of and new models for introductory studio art education.

Thinking Thematically Across Media

The primary content introduced in 20\textsuperscript{th} century art foundations courses was a visual language built around the elements of art and principles of design. As Gude (2004) observed:

The elements and principles are proffered as universal and foundational. The definite article the suggests that these lists propose to be more than attempts to present a descriptive vocabulary of observed form. They are not presented as some vocabulary words or concepts that have been identified as useful for constructing art or interpreting the work of others. The elements and principles are presented as the essence of artmaking. (p. 6)

Open the table of contents in one of the textbooks commonly used in foundations courses (Betz, 2003) such as Design Basics (Lauer, 1999), Art Fundamentals (Ocvirk, 1997), or Launching the Imagination (Stewart, 2002) and you will find that this formal language of art comprise the chapter headings. As already suggested in this chapter, however, terms like color, line, balance, and unity cannot, in themselves, sufficiently describe many postmodern projects.
Postmodern artists and critical art educators recognize that “the foundation vocabulary can work as a probing, questioning tool, if we admit controversial, shifting and challenging terms to it” (Louder, 1997, p. 24). Louder suggested a new, postmodern vocabulary list for beginning art students that reflects the diversity and complexity of contemporary artmaking practices. His lexicon included terms such as appropriation, censorship, hypertext, and visual culture, which underscore artistic intentions and contexts as well as formal concerns. Like Gudes’s (2004) “Postmodern Principles” these terms are hybrids of formal and conceptual issues that reflect postmodernity, visual language understood as an open-system of signs and symbols that includes not only the formal elements and traditional materials of art, but a wide range of images, objects, actions, and theories whose uses and meanings are constantly being renegotiated.

Similarly, Pearse (1992) described the postmodern artist as a bricoleur “or collagist who finds and rearranges fragments of meaning” (p. 249). The preponderance of postmodern artists who refer to their work as non-media-specific supports Pearse’s claim. As previously discussed, these artists choose materials and processes most appropriate for individual projects rather than limiting themselves to working in one medium or form over the course of their careers. To be prepared to think and work in this fashion, students need to learn how to sort through, appropriate, and critically and creatively re-present preexisting banks of information to convey new observations and ideas (Jackson, 1998; Walker, 2005).

Non-medium-specific modes of making imply three intradisciplinary challenges. First, the skills and techniques considered basic must be redefined in addition to how
these are introduced and practiced. Second, knowledge of various historical and
contemporary visual culture and methods for interpreting images and objects must be
treated as fundamental. Third, beginning students must be encouraged to contemplate
and develop working responses to overarching philosophical questions about art that
foster conscious reflection about their work including: What is art? Who is an artist?
What art is for? Who is art for? These objectives relate directly to Jameson’s (1998)
observations about postmodernism and the basic tenants of critical pedagogy.

These three issues converge in a postmodern fascination with content (Jackson,
1999). Teaching students to identify the content of their work and to select media and
forms that reflect that content has become a primary objective for some postsecondary art
educators. Earlier in her tenure at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Becker
(1996) observed:

Students are trained to work in many media and technologies without equivalent
time or guidance in determining what to make work about. It is assumed that
students already have many of the intellectual tools they need to think through the
dilemmas in the content of their work (p. 30).

Becker does not advocate giving students a pre-determined set of inquiry and production
procedures to follow to create content-driven, non-media-specific works of art. However,
her commentary serves as a reminder to foundations instructors who adopt such goals for
their courses. New goals require new ways of organizing courses and curricula to allow
students to make their own choices about what their work will be about and what
techniques they need to learn.
To these ends, some schools, including Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, are using themes rather than media or processes are used as organizing principles for introductory courses and related projects. The use of themes to construct an overarching meta-curriculum follows recommendations that art education ought to be organized around ideas and issues artists have responded to over time and across space (Stewart & Walker, 2006). As Chen (2002/3) suggested:

Themes remain flexible to change so that they don’t become dated or canonical. Concurrent training in critical/visual theory and art history do not follow a linear or chronological order, but are integrated into this thematic structure…Technical skills are always formed in conjunction with concept development. (p. 19)

Themes provide students with open-ended concepts to explore through research and experimentation. That research and experimentation might include identifying and learning about unfamiliar art materials and processes.

Contemporary curators and critics often use themes or concepts to group artists working with similar content in various media and forms. The PBS series Art:21 (Sollins, 2001-2005), for example, has grouped artists by concepts they address through their work like place, power, and memory. An episode of the series on the subject of identity, included works as different as William Wegman’s portraits of dressed up Weimaraner dogs and Michael Ray Charles’s appropriations and re-presentations of traditionally racist images of black people. In the aforementioned exhibition Work Ethic (2003), Molesworth grouped artworks by their resemblance to work in manufacturing, service, and knowledge economies. In these and other instances, themes are a means for making sense of the pluralistic nature of the contemporary artworld where anything goes
and traditional categories like painting and sculpture are relatively useless in helping one comprehend the nature of a work or the intention of the artist who created it.

**Connecting Studio Practice and Art Interpretation**

Students need to be exposed to a wide range of art and artistic practices to “recognize that their ideas do not emerge from a vacuum but rather are influenced and inspired by previous events, ideas, works, and artists” (Dorsey, 2004, 27). To fuel their inspirational reserves, most schools require beginning students to enroll in art history or contemporary issues survey courses. At many schools, however, such courses are not listed as part of the foundations program and even when they are, they are organized and taught according to micro objectives that emphasize technical knowledge like memorizing the spelling of artists’ names and dates their works were created. Divisions between academic and studio art courses foster a false separation between what artists know and what they make.

After twenty years of teaching at three schools, Charles S. Mayer (1994) found: departmental discussions on the purpose of Foundations Programs pay scant attention to the interrelationship between their studio and art history courses, or as my department refers to them, between the creative and cognitive areas which, at least in my department, implies that cognition has little to do with creation” (p. 29).

Robert Bersson (2006) echoed this point, noting that a historic challenge for foundations programs has been “the integration of art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and/or art appreciation into their course offerings” (p. 8). As a solution to this problem, and in recognition of the fact that contemporary art is as much a theoretical as a technical
enterprise, some programs have introduced foundations courses with titles like “Concepts and Issues in Contemporary Art” (The Ohio State University), “Survey of Contemporary Studio Art” (University of Arizona), and “Creative Strategies” (Webster University) that introduce students to trends and practices in contemporary art, often through faculty and visiting artist lectures.

Exposure to a wide range of art and artists may help students understand that art is made by people with different backgrounds, in different contexts, for different purposes. Attending to these differences, students might make more conscious choices about their own goals and objectives as artists. Weintraub (2003) begins *In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art*, her recent text/workbook for artists and art students, with the following essential questions: “Why am I an artist? Who is my audience? How can I communicate with this audience? What is art’s function in society?” (p. 8). These questions aim to raise students’ critical consciousness about how they work and what they make. In so doing, they should be better prepared to make choices about the content and form of their work.

*Introducing Digital Technologies*

The ubiquity of screens in contemporary society means “by the time the average 18 year old college student walks through the door of their first visual design course they will have spent well over 20,000 hours in front of the television” (Arrigo, 2004, p. 12). This account of screen-time increases when video games, web-surfing, and other forms of electronic and digital visual culture are considered. While some art educators lament this time as passive consumption of pop culture, others recognize it “as the equivalent of a ten-year, 40 hour-per-week apprenticeship in visual design” (Arrigo, 2004, 12). They
wonder what students have learned about visual communication through this viewing and how that knowledge might be deconstructed and used as a foundation for theoretical explorations of visuality, how viewers interact and make meaning of images.

Advances in imaging technology over the last century have provided artists and audiences new means for producing and interacting with imagery (Rush, 1999). Developments in the digital revolution continue to challenge traditional definitions of art and goals and objectives for art education. Digital recording, manipulation, and communication technologies provide artists with new tools for production and venues for exhibition. For some artists, like Bill Viola, Natalie Jeremijenko, and Cory Arcangel, new media are intricately linked to content and the form of their work. Others like Alexis Rockman and Richard Serra employ new technologies for the sake of efficiently planning and creating works that ultimately look like traditional paintings and sculptures.

Often new technologies enable artists to work outside of dominant cultural institutions and blur the boundaries between fine and popular forms of art. Thanks to digital production and communications technologies and propelled by the Internet, individuals are now designing and selling their own t-shirts (Threadless.com), writing their own art reviews (Blogspot.com), and sharing independently produced movies (YouTube.com). With the click of a computer mouse, an artist can cut and paste images or audio-video clips into an editing program and manipulate them to instill them with new meaning and purpose. The appropriation and deconstruction of existing material found in much contemporary artwork challenges the modern ideal of artistic originality. Often, it encompasses some form of parody or pastiche that critically challenges or pokes fun at the form or content of the original material.
The do-it-yourself aesthetic evinced by such computer-aided projects is often traced back to the punk rock scene of the 1970s (Triggs, 2006). At that time, the availability of Xerox® machines offered musicians and their fans new ways to publicize events and ideas. The handmade, cut-and-paste quality of this work illustrated direct opposition to mass-produced and corporate controlled music production and distribution. Web 2.0, the current growth of user-generated content on the Internet, presents similar opportunities and points of comparison. That many of those posting work to the Internet were not trained in art schools challenges the very necessity of such programs. As Freedman observed (2003)

Unlike drawing and painting, computer graphics allow people to create, copy, project, manipulate, delete, and reproduce images with an ease and speed that challenges traditional conceptions of talent and technique. In the process of reconfiguring the visual arts, advanced technologies have changed what it means to be educated. (p. 22)

In a recent commentary in Art in America (Rubenstein, 2007) 13 educators, artists, and scholars where asked to discuss issues that confront art schools and university art departments at the beginning of the 21st century. Nearly all of the contributors made some mention of technology. For example King-Hammond, for example, suggested:

The most powerful change to occur in the teaching of artists in the last decade has resulted from the increasing role within all disciplines of art that makes use of electronics, digital technologies, and the Internet. (p. 102).

The university may be responsible, in part, for the growth of such technologically-dependent work. Indeed, without the support of large universities and their facilities,
many artists would never have ventured into new media arts in the first place (Gregg, 2003). As Adler (1979) explained nearly three decades ago:

A visual artist more intrigued by the aesthetic possibilities of computer, video, or laser technology than by those of charcoal or ink are as dependent upon corporate or university backing as a contemporary research scientist whose tools have developed in complexity far beyond those of the eighteenth-century home laboratory. (p. 6)

The eagerness of both professional and amateur artists to embrace these technologies has encouraged art educators to revise curricula and courses (Solomon, 2001). In so doing, however, they must consider the knowledge and ability to produce digital works of art beginning students already possess. Then they must decide how much and which kinds of technologies institutions should take responsibility for teaching, how, and to what ends.

Collaborating in Context

As mentioned, many postmodern artists are eager to dispel the myth of the artist working in isolation from society. They work on commission and in collaboration with communities to create site-specific installations of images (Judy Bacca), objects (Christo and Jeanne Claude), and performances (Christine Hill). They work with people, to create works for people. This is as much a genuine demonstration and progression of artistic interests as it is a response to opposition of critical art projects funded by the National Endowment for the Arts in the late 1980s. As a result of debates at that time, artists and the institutions that support them have to work harder to help the public understand their
goals and objectives in order to secure public and private funding. Artists applying for support from state and regional arts councils, for example, must be able to explain the public value, relevance, or meaning of their work (Cherbo & Wyszomirski, 2000).

Lax (2005) described the manifestation of this trend in artists’ work as a shift “from object to project.” In other words, artists, especially those working in the public sphere, are moving beyond the creation of static, isolated images and objects towards projects that span and interact with time and space. Gregg (2003) noted changes in art schools that reflect these developments. For example, she observed that foundation sculpture classes at prestigious art programs no longer emphasize “modeling the figure or making plaster casts. Instead, video installation, site-specific, earth, conceptual, and performance art have been grafted onto the sculpture syllabi” (p. 106). Work in these genres are non-media specific and blur boundaries between traditional art school departmental divisions. Kirschner (in Rubenstein, 2007) suggested:

It is collaborative practice that erases conventional boundaries between designers, environmentalists, scientists and artists. In the best art schools and universities, students find opportunities to span mediums and blend them in hybrid compositions, whether involving oil paint or immersive virtual environments, without the imperatives of commodification and beyond the confines of traditional practice. (p. 108)

Artists working with more traditional media and processes are also developing relationships with other artists in collectives (Royal Art Lodge), with scholars in areas outside art (Mark Dion), and with fabricators of their images and objects (Matthew Barney). These artists invite others to help them flesh out and execute their ideas. As
with digital appropriation, such collaborations work against modern myths of originality and genius and often make use of digital communications technology for sharing ideas in process.

Noticing these trends, foundations program coordinators and faculty are planning opportunities for students to explore collaborative artmaking practices. Examples from Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago appear in the following chapters. Often, collaborative assignments offer relatively open-ended prompts that require students to manage practical issues like developing an idea and delegating responsibility for executing those ideas. I heard examples of similar projects at the FATE 2007 Biennial Conference during a session titled “Collaboration in the Formative Years.” For example, 3-D Concepts course instructors from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee described a puppet-making project based on the Dada method of collaboration known as exquisite corpse. Students from different sections of the course exchanged marionettes in process as they honed their woodworking skills.

In the future, those interested in more explicitly integrating critical approaches to artmaking in foundations collaborations might do so through, for example, service learning initiatives. Service learning combines academic study, service work, and reflection to “enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2004). Though he did not offer specific recommendations for Foundations programs, Forde (2003) outlined goals and a theoretical framework for service learning in relation to art education. Forde included
support for “environment-dependent learners (Anderson, 1995)” and exposure to professional opportunities as two benefits of such work that foundation coordinators and instructors might consider.

Attending to Identity Politics

A further concern for those teaching introductory courses is the increasingly gendered, multicultural, and international character of institutionalized contemporary art and postsecondary education. The documentary series *Art:21* (Sollins, 2001-2005) presents “a diverse group of both established and emerging artists working in America today and the art they are producing now” (Art:21/PBS, 2005). Art educators at all levels have embraced the videos, books, and website affiliated with this project to help them introduce contemporary artmaking practices to new audiences, allowing the artists’ own words and actions to demystify their processes of creation. Of fifty-five artists represented in the first three seasons: nearly half were women; one fifth originally from other countries including Latvia, Korea, and Puerto Rico; and another fifth representative of various U.S. sub-cultures including African-Americans, Hispanics, and gay and lesbian men and women. Though not all of these artists make work about identity-related issues, their presence in the series celebrates the end of a European, Christian, heteronormative dominated institutional art world.

Students studying art in colleges and universities in the United States are increasingly provided opportunities to mix and mingle with students of cultural backgrounds different from their own. This provides opportunities as well as challenges to faculty and students. Different values and cultural expectations for students and teachers can lead to conflicts if not candidly and compassionately addressed.
Simultaneous to increasing international interactions on campus, colleges and universities increasingly encourage and provide opportunities for students to study abroad. Some schools now require applicants to have a passport and study in another country during their undergraduate education. The dean of Harvard University told Gregg (2004) that the school hopes to “educate its students—who will live and work in all corners of the globe—as citizens not only of their home country but also of the world.” What kind of foundations in art will students need to approach these learning situations?

**Conclusion: Embracing Postmodernism**

The field in which postmodern critical art educators are attempting to rewrite foundations for art education is complex. In Chapters 4 and 5, I provide descriptions of two introductory studio art curricula that embrace that complexity with open eyes and critical attention. In portraying foundations at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I do not mean to suggest that these programs are fully-realized or devoid of glitches. I do believe, however, that they are promising attempts to attend to postmodern developments in artmaking and tenants of critical pedagogy. Readers will notice courses organized around non-media-specific themes and introductions to digital technologies, faculty and students challenging modern foundations and integrating knowledge from a range of disciplines, and issues addressed in cultural studies.

Before I present these cases of innovation, in the following chapter I describe the research methodologies and methods I used to organize my studies of these programs. I
hope readers less familiar with qualitative research and more familiar with contemporary artmaking practices will appreciate some of the similarities between the methods I employed in my research and the postmodern modes of artmaking I described in this chapter.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher

As part of my doctoral coursework and preparation for this study, I completed a series of classes on qualitative research theories and methods in The Ohio State University College of Education. The courses were bound together by Denzin & Lincoln’s (2000) *Handbook on Qualitative Research*, often referred to as the bible for both its content and scale, and Dr. Patti Lather, an oft-cited theorist on feminist and postmodern approaches to qualitative research. Through readings, discussions, research, and writing assignments, Dr. Lather led my classmates and me to consider the “triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis [that] confronts qualitative researchers in the human disciplines” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). In other words, she asked us to reflect on the purposes and methodologies that guide our work as social science researchers at the dawn of the 21st century.

These and other courses that addressed contemporary issues and theories in art, culture, and education, fostered my growing attention to the fluid and partial nature of what I know, how I have come to know what I know, what claims I can make to knowing, what language I might use to communicate any knowledge I have to share, and
what additional actions I might take based on that knowledge. I do not believe I or any other researcher can produce a purely descriptive study. I cannot avoid making personal interpretations based on my prior knowledge and experiences. I can only tell a story, my story, about and with data I collect and analyze, not the story or anyone else’s story. Yet I promised my advisor, dissertation committee members, and the administrators, faculty, and students who agreed to participate in this study that I would produce descriptive case studies of two innovative undergraduate studio art foundations programs.

I brought this deceptively clear goal and my nearly paralyzing questions about the politics of representation to my readings of literature about the purposes and methods of conducting case studies. In this chapter, I describe case study as the primary organizing methodology for my dissertation. In addition, I discuss “portraiture,” a type of case study methodology introduced by Lawrence-Lightfoot in *The Good High School* (1983). The concept of portraiture influenced how I constructed and documented the case portraits I present in the following chapters. Following a brief overview of the defining characteristics of these methodologies, I provide an inventory of the various types of data I collected at each school including my observations of educational environments and classroom practices, analyses of institutional documents, teaching materials, and student work, interviews with faculty and focus groups with students. I conclude with a discussion of my interpretation and synthesis of data using constant comparative methods of analysis in order to identify and interpret patterns within and between the cases.

Throughout the chapter, I discuss methodological issues I attended to during the study. These include my awareness of the predilections I brought to the study, my concerns for establishing reciprocity with participants, and the relative credibility of my
work. I use credibility here as an alternative to validity, a term with roots in quantitative research inadequate for evaluating the objectives of descriptive research (Stake, 2000). I address credibility in terms of three procedural issues—**transferability**, in terms of my choice of selectively sampled cases; **triangulation**, with regard for my use of various data sources; and **member checks** that enabled key informants to comment on my descriptions and review and approve their quotations.

**Methodological Issue Interlude:**

*Researcher Predilections and Theoretical Sensitivity*

As I discussed in the previous chapter, a variety of prior knowledge and experiences inspired and influenced my study of undergraduate introductory studio art curricula at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. First, I was and remain interested in artists and designers whose work, in terms of both form and content, addresses social, political, or environmental issues. Such artists are public intellectuals or “…educators who provide insights and raise questions about the world, and audience members as learners who actively make meaning of the artworks they consume” (Kushins, 2005, ¶1). Their work often blurs boundaries between artistic disciplines and between art and other ways of knowing, embraces technological innovations, and appropriates discourses from popular and other folk cultures. Second, I was curious about how my own undergraduate art education could have prepared me better to work in this capacity.

Upon my preliminary review of their mission statements and curriculum overviews, Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago seemed to support such practices. In addition, these school’s seemed to reflect trends in
postsecondary education including cultural studies, participatory-action research, and
service learning which compliment the work of socially-, politically-, and
environmentally-engaged artists. I hoped to present these programs as models for others
interested in educating artists to engage in artistic projects and practices with instrumental
as well and formal and expressive value.

   The interests I have just described represent my artistic and pedagogical
predilections. In literature on qualitative research, these are often referred to as
researcher biases. I find the negative connotations of the term bias restrictive,
particularly because my so-called biases explain what led me to conduct this study in the
first place. I prefer to think of my predilections as, “guiding preoccupations” (Lightfoot,
1983) and “theoretical sensitivity” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which describe the
contributions my professional and personal knowledge and experience have made on my
research. Strauss and Corbin defined theoretical sensitivity as “…the attribute of having
insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to
separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (p. 42). They warn, however, that while
familiarity with the sites and situations one is studying can help one “move into the
situation and gain insight more quickly” it can also “block you from seeing things that
have become routine” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 42).

   My first inclination, to highlight the conceptual connections between selected
foundations curricula and the roles artists play as critical leaders in society, was an
example of how predilections can limit one’s ability to observe a situation with fresh
eyes. When I proposed to generate a grounded theory to guide instrumentally-oriented
introductory postsecondary curriculum development based on the models provided by
Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, my dissertation committee reminded me that all I knew about these programs at that time was what they said about themselves on their websites. They urged me to investigate how the curriculum advertised in each school’s promotional materials were understood, implemented, and experienced by faculty and students before making claims about or recommendations based on a priori assumptions about the programs. As a result, I designed and carried out the descriptive study presented in this dissertation.

**Methodology #1: Descriptive Case Study**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, art educators are hungry for in-depth descriptions of innovative undergraduate introductory visual art programs. Some of these individuals are interested in designing and implementing alternative curricula at their schools. Others are skeptical of such change but admit that little is known about what is happening in the name of reform. This gap in the literature bolstered my commitment to conduct descriptive case studies of innovative foundations programs. I accepted this deceptively simple mission because, as Merriam (2001) suggested, descriptive case studies can be useful in providing:

…basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education. Such studies often form a database for future comparison and theory building. (p. 38)

At its most elementary level, a descriptive case study aims to do just what its name implies – to present a detailed description of a specified phenomenon. That phenomenon might be a person, event, or institution. According to Robert Stake (1995):
“Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Similarly, Yin (2003) recognized the situated nature of distinct cases. He suggested: “A descriptive case study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (p. 5). Ignoring for the moment these and other authors’ realist assumptions that research “… can create a window onto, or mirror of, some [complete and objective] reality” (Talburt, 2004, p. 85), I found them useful. They encouraged me to focus my attention on the particular structures and practices of the foundations programs and participants I endeavored to study before making any theoretical claims about them.

The emphases Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) placed on the context of cases under study supported my desire to link micro-level observations of studio art curricula and instructional strategies with other macro-level theories about contemporary art and culture-at-large (Layder, 1993). To this end, I selected cases for intrinsic as well as instrumental reasons (Stake, 1995). Intrinsically, I was interested in finding out more about the unique and seemingly innovative ways Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago organize and implement introductory level studio art courses and their rationale for doing so. Instrumentally, I wondered what insights the experiences of faculty and students in these programs might offer others interested in reforming foundations curriculum. In other words, I wondered if and how experiences at these schools might transfer to other institutions.

Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility as Transferability

As previously stated, some would argue that the sole purpose of case study research is to describe the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. My final
guiding research question for this study, “What might others learn from the experiences of faculty and students in these programs?” and my instrumental case selection suggest my intentions were not so limited. As with “art beyond art’s sake” (Pietaro, 2003), I was not simply interested in studying these cases for the sake of studying them. I tried to present write this dissertation to promote active readership. As with cases written for classroom teaching purposes, I sought to inspire readers to transfer questions raised and issues addressed by faculty and students at the programs in my study towards their own experiences and institutional contexts. As Naumes and Naumes’s (1999) wrote: “A case like a good story, also has a theme or message, something for the listener or reader to take away and continue to think about, once the story has ended” (p. 1).

Transferability is one way that the credibility of qualitative research can be evaluated. Transferability relies on the researcher to establish space for readers to compare documented cases to their own or other already familiar situations. As Robert Donmoyer (1990) proposed, case studies “enrich the repertoire of social constructions available to practitioners and others; [and] may help, in other words, in the forming of questions rather than in the finding of answers” (p. 182). He maintained that after reading a case study, one “should be able both to see different things and to see things differently” (p. 193). In other’s words, “case studies provide a means by which readers can learn through the discussion of actual situations and circumstances, by following the action and analyzing the thoughts and decision processes of real people, faced with real problems, in real settings” (Naumes & Naumes, 1999, p. 10).

Some aspects of the curricula I selected differ radically from the standard series of introductory level visual art courses. While I do not expect every reader will be eager to
celebrate or emulate aspects of either program, I hope the form and content of this study will provide a model for institutional reflection as well as points for comparing and contrasting institutional, artistic, and pedagogical ideals. I have already been invited to share reports based on this research in presentations at various conferences including “Defying Inertia: Innovations in Undergraduate Art Foundations Higher Education” (2007 National Art Education Association Convention), “Didn’t They Teach You Anything in High School?: Tabulae Rasae or Works in Process”, (2007 FATE Biennial Conference), and “Teaching the Three C’s: Two Portraits,” (Foundations in Art: Theory and Education Think Tank II, 2007). I hope my work will continue to be appreciated by postsecondary art administrators, faculty, and students, inspiring and guiding them to examine and articulate their own teaching and learning objectives and practices.

Methodology #2: Portraiture

As suggested above, in order to maximize reader engagement and transferability, I realized I would have to pay attention not only to what programs I wrote about, but how I wrote about them. Like works of art, research reports can be more or less intriguing. Law (1993) noted: “novels are ends in themselves, worth-reading in their own right. Academic writings are means to other ends” (p. 11). He challenged academic writers evaluating their own writing to consider the pleasures most individuals derive from reading non-academic literature. While not all types of academic reports should adhere to this standard—policy makers, for example, might prefer summative observations and recommendations rather than detailed narratives – it seems relevant to studies with
descriptive intentions. My own attempts to compose engaging descriptions of 
educational settings and situations have been informed by Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1983) 
methodology of “portraiture.”

Lawrence-Lightfoot first introduced the idea of social science portraiture in the 
introduction to *The Good High School* (1983). She suggested discussions about 
educational practices and philosophies should build on descriptions of school cultures 
“relatively unencumbered by theoretical frames or rigid perspectives” (1983, p. 9). She 
questioned, however, classic empirical case study objectives and researchers who claim 
their work presents “factual events of what happened” written “from the perspective of a 
disinterested observer” (Naumes & Naumes, 1999, p. 18). Alternately, Lawrence-
Lightfoot urged portrait writers to recognize that their representations can never be 
complete or theory-free. The aim of a portrait, she explained, is “not complete and full 
representation, but rather the selection of some aspect of—or angle on—reality that 
would transform our vision of the whole” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5). In the process 
of creating portraits, researchers, like artists, interact with, respond to, and interpret their 
subjects. As such, portraits reveal something about researchers as well as their subjects. 
They are, in other words, interpretive likenesses rather than objective depictions.

When I entered the worlds of education and educational research, I brought my 
prior artistic training and critical worldview with me. As a result, I responded 
enthusiastically to Lightfoot’s efforts to merge scientific empiricism and artistic 
interpretation. I found the idea of creating portraits of introductory undergraduate studio 
art programs particularly appealing and appropriate. I imagined the appearances, actions,
and comments of the faculty and students I would meet at each school, as well as those settings themselves, would be stimulating and best represented through the contextualized storytelling portraiture encourages.

*Methodological Issue Interlude:*

*Participant Reciprocity and Institutional Support*

To create richly layered portraits, I planned to compliment excerpts from institutional documents and commentary from my observations with faculty and students’ own words. Before beginning my research, I sought support and permission from administrators at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (see Appendix A) as well as the Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University. I provided them with information about the study including a summary of my research interests, rationale, proposed methods, and plans for circulating my findings. I assured the institutions that my intentions were to produce interpretive descriptions of their programs rather than judgmental evaluations. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) wrote about her simultaneously admiring and critical portraits of high schools, my selection of these schools was intended to honor, by making visible, the work of administrators, faculty, and students at these schools. I took their willingness to participate as a sign of healthy self-confidence.

I hoped to create a space where participants and I could jointly explore the question “What should undergraduate studio art students know and be able to do at the end of their first year?,” raise additional questions, and learn together. My ability to construct detailed and intriguing portraits of each school relied on these people’s experiences and reflective insights. Therefore, I strove to incorporate participants’
questions about their programs as well as in my own. For example, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s First Year Program employs team-teaching in its year-long Core Studio Practice course. Administrators there expressed interest in my observations of how various teams approached this challenge. While my observations and interpretation of these practices do not have much presence in this report, I had conversations on this subject with faculty and administrators in the field that were bolstered by my focused attention to these issues. I hoped my observations and discussions, in person and in print, about topics like this would provide faculty and students with space for contemplation and inspire them to continue to review their goals and objectives.

Participant comments throughout the study were encouraging and made me feel my presence was appreciated. Faculty at both schools said it was nice to have me around and that my presence and questions inspired them to reflect on what they were doing and why. Perhaps the greatest compliment came in the form of invitations to share my findings with faculty at each institution. Throughout this study, participants’ interest in my work provided ongoing motivation.

Data Collection

Stake (1995) observed: “There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study… A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case” (p. 49). In my experience preparing for and embarking on this study, I found Stake’s comments apt. In retrospect, I first began seriously considering the instrumental and pedagogical roles of artists in society in relation to undergraduate art education reform in the fall of 2003, my first quarter as a
doctoral student at The Ohio State University. Since then, I have taken courses, attended conferences, participated in conversations, and conducted research projects that furthered my investigations of artistic practices and postsecondary art education. As discussed in the previous chapter, these investigations and related thought experiments generated data, helped me identify key concepts in postsecondary art education, and articulate the questions I explored in this study.

Qualitative case study researchers employ a variety of methods to gather data including document analysis, observations, and interviews. Our work demands data banks that are deep as well as broad. One source leads to another and it is our job to document and analyze these sources and identify and interpret the relationships between them. As Merriam (2001) wrote: “Data collection in a case study is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data,” (p. 134). She went on to observe that:

…the process is generally very interactive and holistic. You observe something on-site that you then ask about in an interview; or something may come to your attention in a document that manifests itself in an observation and perhaps informal conversation in the context of observation. (p. 148)

Throughout my research I found myself caught up in this web of inquiry.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) descriptions of constructing portraits reveal similarly inductive processes. Davis referred to the balanced unity portraitists strive for as the “the aesthetic whole” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 33). She described this primarily in terms of both the selection and presentation, or composition, of information. She wrote:
The negotiation of balance in works of art and research portraits relies on the artist’s or researcher’s judgment—the manipulation of elements to find what is right, what works, and the equally important experience of deciding what doesn’t fit and what needs to be reconsidered or excluded. (p. 33)

This highlights another way in which social science case study and artistic portraiture are related. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) described the qualitative researcher as an “interpretive bricoleur” (p. 3) who actively creates representations by appropriating and juxtaposing excerpts of various data sources. In other words, cases portraits are, “…the result of far-reaching attention to multiple sources of data is a collage of carefully chosen facts, views, voices, and impressions” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 64).

Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997), Merriam (2001), and Denzin & Lincoln (2000) acknowledge that collection and analysis are interdependent and concurrent rather than sequential. As one collects and organizes data, one begins to review and form interpretations that lead to further queries and data gathering. On a practical level, as Kvale (1996) and Spradley (1980) cautioned, one should never put oneself in a position of having to analyze hundreds of pages of interview transcripts or field notes. Rather, one should be analyzing and synthesizing as the study moves forward, *in order for* the study, a work in process, to move forward. Dr. Lather also stressed this point in her research methods classes. She urged us to simultaneously collect, analyze, and write up our research, a three-pronged process that facilitated my work.

By employing data from a variety of sources, I was able to produce saturated descriptions of introductory visual art education at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Carnegie Mellon University. In addition, this diversity helped me validate,
or give credibility to my observations and interpretations through the triangulation, or interactive overlay, of sources. I discuss this methodological concern following the introduction of various components of my data corpus, the palette or raw materials with which I composed my case portraits.

Institutional Observations

In order to describe the institutional contexts that support introductory undergraduate visual art education at Carnegie Mellon and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I spent time at each school during the 2006-2007 academic year (see Appendix B for my field work schedules). According to Angrosino & Pérez (2000), qualitative researchers must observe contexts in order to understand cultures and participants in their integrated complexity. Simply put, what we observe and where we observe it are inextricably connected. I planned my campus visits, most of which lasted 3-5 days, as efforts to gain comprehensive understandings of the built and social contexts of each school. As a relatively “passive observer” (Spradley, 1980, p. 59), I monitored faculty and student activities in and around studio-classrooms before, during, and after classes. In essence, I hung around to get a feel for the ecology of each campus. On occasion, I was invited to shift from passive to “moderate” (Spradley, 1980, p. 60) participation during which times I contributed comments to critiques or offered my interpretation or opinion on an issue.

I focused my observations around the guiding research questions listed in Chapter 1. At each school, I listened and watched for references to artistic concepts and uses of pedagogical methods referred to in each program’s goals and objectives. I noted how and in relation to what topics, techniques, exemplars, and assignments concepts were...
introduced and discussed. I monitored critiques of student work to see how they were orchestrated. Using Spradley’s (1980) “descriptive question matrix” as a rough guide, I recorded places, actors, objects, and actions I observed. I wrote more narrative and interpretive notes immediately following my observations. These extended observation notes formed an important data reserve of stories I used to flesh out my portraits. In addition, I used memo writing to begin to identify and name themes I used to direct further observations and conversations, and later as part of the framework for my case portraits.

*Institutional Documents*

I examined programmatic mission statements, curricular outlines, course descriptions, syllabi, and student work from each school to gain awareness of how each program articulated the goals and structures of introductory undergraduate studio art education. I obtained mission statements and curricular outlines for each program on the Internet. These public documents serve as informational marketing tools. They describe the goals and objectives of each program and the school’s vision for student development. As such, they are important rhetorical devices to examine. As the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (1991) asserted in its guidelines for assessing undergraduate programs: “The communication of mission, goals, and objectives to all constituencies involved in undergraduate art/design curriculum is essential to preserve a sense of rationality about the variety of operations that cause it to function” (p. 4). In other words, these documents *should* serve as guideposts for planning and implementing curricula and courses. Mission statements should not be constructed for accreditation reviews and then forgotten about.
I obtained course descriptions and syllabi from faculty and departmental administrators. I aimed to collect at least 2-3 variations of syllabi for each course so I could examine comparative interpretations of departmental course objectives. I was interested to note what kind of assignments, readings, and resources were mentioned in these documents and if and how they varied between instructors. To help me make sense of different approaches, I requested artist statements and teaching philosophies from the faculty members I interviewed. Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain these documents from all participants, particularly as that list snowballed. Whenever possible, however, I did explore faculty websites reviewing reproductions of their work, as well as their own and other’s statements about their work. This gave me a sense of how the teaching-artists I observed defined art through their own modes of making.

I examined student work discussed during in-process, midterm, and final critiques and on display in hallway and gallery spaces. I was interested in student work that represented a range of responses to assignments. In other words, I was interested in seeing work from students who embraced and excelled as well as those who struggled with the assignments. This goal was facilitated by my attendance at real-time critiques in which all students shared their work as opposed to asking students and faculty to bring work to share with me during our discussions.

**Faculty interviews**

Kvale (1996) described the qualitative research interview as a “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (p. 6). He metaphorically suggested one think of the interview as “a construction site of knowledge” (p. 2) or “a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee roles” (p. 127). I
appreciate these ideas because, as I stated earlier, I hoped my study would, and will continue to, open space for discussion of foundation studies. I hoped the educators I worked with would exploit our conversations as opportunities for pedagogical reflection. Additionally, in my requests for faculty participation (see Appendix C) I strove to convince potential interviewees that their colleagues at other schools would appreciate access to their experiences and insights.

I scheduled semi-structured interviews with instructors and program administrators at both Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the Fall of 2006. I tried to create samples that reflected the diversity of gender, artistic practices, and instructional situations of faculty at each institution. I secured initial recommendations for participants at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago from Jim Elniski, the Director of the First Year Program. Due to this process of recommendation, I could not ensure participants absolute anonymity although I did offer to use self-selected pseudonyms to identify them in my reports. With more than 50 part-time faculty teaching in that program, Elniski’s guidance was greatly appreciated. Most of the faculty he recommended had been teaching at The School for a few years. This enabled them to speak from a relatively informed position on the changes I was investigating. As the study progressed, however, I questioned how Jim’s selections may have affected my findings. How did he make his choices? Whose experiences did he include? Whom did he exclude? Ultimately, I decided that the choices made for me were some of the conditions that shaped my portraits and part of what would make them different from portraits someone else might write.
I was left to my own devices recruiting participants at Carnegie Mellon University. The process was simplified by the fact that the program is much smaller and has mostly full-time and tenured faculty teaching introductory courses. I made my preliminary choices and contacts based on the course schedule for the Fall 2006 semester and responses I received from the faculty I contacted.

As necessary, I conducted additional interviews at each school in the Spring of 2006. In some cases, I spoke to the same faculty I had spoken with in the fall, my key informants, who have central roles in devising and administering introductory courses. Others were conversations with new participants whom I was introduced to on earlier visits. In one instance I revisited a conversation with a faculty member at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago who had returned to the First Year Program in the fall after a few years teaching at another institution. When we met in the fall, she felt she needed more time to experience and reflect on the new First year Program before talking with me about her perception of it. I appreciated her thoughtfulness and willingness to make time to meet with me again in the spring.

I worked in consultation with Alison Crocetta, Foundations Coordinator at The Ohio State University to develop my faculty interview questions, as well as the student focus group questioning route described in the following section. Crocetta’s input represented an *emic*, or insider’s, perspective that I do not have on undergraduate foundations instruction. To further this goal, I distributed my questions to participants prior to our meetings so they could look them over and consider additional areas they might like to discuss during our conversations. This reflected my aforementioned desire to take participants’ interests and concerns into account whenever possible. Most seemed
satisfied that the questions were “good enough to generate the discussion you hope for but open enough to not lead me” (personal communication, October 9, 2006). Few made any preliminary comments on the questions which may be a reflection of the amount of the time they were willing to give to the study as much as a sign of their approval of the questions. Others came to our meeting with the questions printed out and responses jotted down.

I asked participants to provide me, in advance of the interviews, with some basic information about themselves as teaching-artists. This included information on their own educational backgrounds, how long they had been teaching at Carnegie Mellon University or The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, artist statements, and links to their websites, when available. Obtaining as much of this basic information as possible in advance helped me make the best use of our brief interview sessions, the majority of which lasted between 50 and 80 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews do not strictly follow a script. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) noted, these interviews follow many of the rules of ordinary conversation except that they are, “more focused, more in-depth, and more detailed…and also less balanced, because one person does most of the questioning and the other does most of the answering” (p. 108). The last part of this comment, related to the power structure inherent in interviews echoed Charmaz’s (2000) caution that one-shot interviews may yield preconceived “public version[s] of the story” (p. 525). In other words, participants sometimes say what they expect an interviewer or their colleagues want them to say about a subject. With this in mind, I was prepared to ask the faculty members I spoke with clarifying questions about the use of fashionable artistic and academic terms. I
followed-up with participants via email and informal conversations during subsequent campus visits about ideas that emerged as important and in need of further elucidation during the analysis and writing phases of my project.

My prepared interview questions included:

1. What skills, historical knowledge, and conceptual understandings do you think beginning art students need to learn?

2. What values, knowledge, experiences, and structures influence your teaching and assessment strategies in introductory level courses?

3. How do you account for the differences between the traditional (Bauhaus-inspired) foundations curriculum employed at many schools and the introductory courses required of students at your school?

4. What do you think might be the effects of these differences?

I recorded the interviews, made note of key words throughout, and wrote interpretive memos as soon after as possible. While transcribing the interviews, I noted my initial responses and interpretations, points in need of clarification, and emerging patterns of speech and issues of concern. These patterns became the primary organizing topics, or codes, for my case portraits.

Student Focus Groups

My review of literature on postsecondary art education revealed a scarcity of student voices. One notable exception is Medford’s (2005) call for “Revising the System” based on reflections of her own postsecondary art education and the state of
contemporary artworlds. This inspired me to plan focus group discussions about introductory visual art courses with students at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Focus groups are “…carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1988, p. 18). Some research participants find focus groups less intimidating than individual interviews and focus groups can provide a space for participants to learn from one another (Madriz, 2000). Kleiber (2004) noted:

The focus group operates on the assumption that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts…the method depends on the interaction of the group to stimulate participants to think beyond their own private thoughts and articulate their opinions. (p. 91)

These psychological and cognitive benefits seemed relevant to my work. As with my faculty interviews, I hoped my focus groups would provide student participants with additional, semi-structured opportunities to reflect on their education in addition to providing me with insight into their experiences. I was not sure how much first year students would have to say or how much confidence they would have to speak openly about their artistic interests and educational expectations. Overall, I was happy to find students were willing, often eager, to talk to me.

Students at each school routinely came up to me in the hallways and asked me for more information about what I was doing following brief introductions by their professors. On my second visit to Carnegie Mellon University, one student offered to show me a movie he made in response to an assignment I had heard him and his
classmates discuss on my previous trip. On my first trip to The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I found an article about curricular changes to the First Year Program in *fNews*, a student publication (Carating, 2006). I was impressed to find students keeping track of and discussing changes in the program. I later learned that the School annually invites first year students to provide feedback on their experiences, encouraging this kind of critical reflection.

While reviewing descriptions of focus groups and recommendations for facilitating them, I came to understand their structure akin to class discussions. Both are forms of constructivist pedagogy in which leader/teacher and participant/student work together to come to a better understanding of the topic at hand. This does not mean that consensus is the goal. On the contrary, focus groups should “…promote candid expression [and] allow a range of opinions to surface” (Kleiber, 2004, p. 91).

The following is the basic questioning route I used to direct my focus groups. The categories of questions – opening, introductory, transition, key and ending – follow Kleiber’s (2004) suggestions for advancing conversations to ensure active participation by the greatest number of participants:

1. Opening questions: What is your name? Where are you from?
   Name an artist are you most excited/inspired by at the moment.

2. Introductory question: Why did you decide to study/major in art?

3. Transition questions: What are your artistic goals? What do you think you need to know and be able to do to reach these goals?

4. Key questions: What are you learning/did you learn from your first year courses? Is there anything you would change about those courses?
5. Ending Questions: Is there anything we didn’t talk about that you would like to discuss? How do you feel about your participation in this discussion?

The formality of meeting with a relative stranger for a planned discussion prohibited open dialogue in some groups. Drawing from my reserve of teaching strategies, I devised a quick-write exercise to spark discussion in one group. Wilbert McKeachie (2002) described this strategy of asking students to respond in writing to discussion questions prior to beginning group conversation to allow students an opportunity to collect their thoughts and reduce feelings of anticipation. In this instance, I distributed two slips of paper to each member of the group and asked them to write, anonymously, “the best” and “the worst” thing about their first year courses. I suggested these might include successes, lessons learned, challenges, frustrations, and recommendations. As students turned their papers in to me, I quickly skimmed their responses and coded or divided them into groups – technical training, community, conceptual work. I read selected comments aloud and asked for responses from the group. For the remainder of our time together, the discussion flowed nicely and I had to cut people off rather than beg them to speak up.

I planned to conduct focus groups with two sets of students at each site – first year and upper level students. Following recommendations from the literature on focus groups (Krueger, 1988; Kleiber, 2004), each group consisted of 7-10 students. Ultimately, scheduling these sessions proved difficult. I had some luck organizing groups of students through email to meet with me at Carnegie Mellon but ultimately faced tardiness in the freshman group and a last minute scheduling conflict with the upper level group. One faculty member allowed me to use an hour of his class time and this
proved the best way to get a captive audience. Based on that experience, I requested class time for focus groups from faculty at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which enabled me to meet with three groups. I interpreted faculty willingness to devote class time to these discussions a sign of their understanding that students might benefit from time talking about their educational experiences.

Because the majority of my time was spent in first year classes, connecting with upper level students proved impossible. While I was interested in hearing students reflect on the influence of their introductory classes on their subsequent educations, I ultimately did not feel that information was necessary to my goal of describing the programs. As I suggest in the final chapter, as part of my recommendations for future research, I think it would be useful to study the impacts of nontraditional foundations curricula, from both faculty and student perspectives.

Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility through Triangulation

Even as I recognize the partial nature of my understanding of the programs described in the next two chapters, I still hope my case portraits correspond to experiences of those who teach and learn in introductory studio art courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In other words, I want readers to feel confident that the descriptions I provide would be relatively similar to those any other researcher might compose. As Robert Stake (2000) suggests:

With reporting and reading both ‘ill-structured’ (and within an atmosphere of constructivism), it is not surprising to find here a tolerance of ambiguity and the championing of multiple perspectives. Still, I have yet to meet any case researchers who are unconcerned about the clarity and validity of their own
communications. Even if meanings do not transfer intact but squeeze into the conceptual space of the reader, there is no less urgency for researchers to assure that their senses of situation, observation, reporting and reading stay within some limits of correspondence” (p. 444)

Attempting to provide correspondence between my reports and the cases themselves, I integrated excerpts from institutional documents and discussions with faculty and students with notes from my observations. This diversity, or triangulation, of data allowed me to explore and present aspects of each case from multiple perspectives.

In addition to helping one see details of the case more clearly, a variety of perspectives produces “greater density of coverage of the area…[ensuring that] in the end, findings will be anchored in more robust interpretations and explanations of the empirical area in question” (Layder, 1993, p. 122). This suggests a direct relationship between the density and correspondence of descriptions. Laurel Richardson (2000) expanded upon the notion of descriptive density with her discussion of crystallization. Recognizing the complexity of situations, she suggested replacing the stable, triangular, concept of credibility with the irregular shape and form of a crystal.

In triangulation, a researcher deploys different methods”—such as interviews, census data, and documents—to ‘validate’ findings. These methods, however, carry the same domain assumption that there is a ‘fixed point’ or ‘object’ to that can be triangulated. But in postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate; we crystallize. We recognize that there are far more than ‘three sides’ from which to approach the world. (p. 934)
While I designed this study to collect and capitalize on a variety of resources, it was not until I got into the field and began to realize the complexity of each program, the simultaneity of actions and objectives in various sections of courses, that I came to embrace the crystallized nature of my observations, understandings, and descriptions. 

In an effort to provide the reader with a sense of my fractured experiences in the field, I shift between voices in the case portraits that follow. The bulk of each portrait is presented in regular font and presents overviews of and stories behind the evolution of introductory undergraduate studio art curricular innovation at each school. These sections include excerpts from institutional documents, interviews, and focus groups. My own direct observations of classroom practices, titled *Instructional Interludes*, appear in italics throughout the portraits. These “vignettes” offer focused descriptions of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic [of each case. They have] a narrative, storylike structure that preserves chronological flow …normally limited to a brief time span, to one or a few key actors, to bounded space, or to all three. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 83)

I believe the case portraits I present adequately reflect *my* research experiences while recognizing that others might tell different stories with my data.

**Data analysis**

My primary goals in conducting *Brave New Basics* were examining and interpretively describing introductory visual art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. To these ends, I gathered data and looked for patterns across that data to create a “thematic framework for the construction of the
narrative[s]” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185) or case portraits, which I present in the following chapters. Some of these themes, or analysis codes, reflected concepts and trends I discussed in Chapter 2 as well as my own experiences as an art student and art educator. Others emerged as I gathered, organized, and began analyzing data from each site. Some of these emergent themes were developed in my reflective memos and case portraits. As Richardson (2000) suggested, in this study writing was one of my methods of inquiry and analysis as well as reporting.

Identifying Themes

According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), most researchers “…start with some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and subthemes as they go” (p. 781). Through reviews of literature, prior research projects and thought experiments (Wolcott, 2001), and personal experiences as an art student, educator, and advocate, I clarified my research interests and developed preliminary themes that I planned to explore during my fieldwork. These are reflected in my case selections and initial guiding research questions. For example, I was interested in what skills, concepts and techniques were considered fundamental, and what beliefs about art and education guided individuals teaching introductory visual art courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I anticipated that some of these themes and areas of interest would remain vital while others would lose their importance as new themes emerged during my fieldwork and data analysis.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, cultural and institutional rituals, triangulation of data, and contrasting perspectives as means of identifying themes for portraits. The concept of repetitive...
refrains was particularly useful in reminding me to make note of terms that were repeated in documents and dialogue at each institution. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, for example, describes the computer as “the 21\textsuperscript{st}-century pencil” (SAIC, 2006). Faculty discussed and debated the costs and benefits of bringing this technology into first year courses. During more than one of my observations at The School, faculty requests to borrow a pencil were met with silence. While instructors seemed incredulous that in a classroom full of art students there would be no pencils, they were simultaneously enabling students to shift from analog to digital imaging making processes.

Resonant metaphors also focus on language in use, however metaphors are intentionally symbolic statements. Whereas the first category of terms takes on importance through repetition and interpretation, the latter garners force through its poetic nature. Education is often described as a journey along a path of one sort or another. One faculty member at Carnegie Mellon, for example, described the introductory curriculum there as “a map we’re making so students can navigate different potentials at different levels” (L. Burgess, personal communication, December 6, 2006). Along every path, there are guideposts and markers that help travelers track their course. In art education, rituals, like final critiques and exhibitions unite institutional communities and demonstrate their values. In the programs I reviewed for this dissertation, for example, critiques and exhibitions of student work were a consistent and ongoing rite of passage.

I have already written about my use of triangulation in regard to the credibility of my research. Reading across my varied data corpus, I engaged in constant comparison, which I describe in greater detail in the next section, to build my awareness of emergent
themes. In addition to looking for converging patterns of information, I drew out deviant or discrepant data to provide contrast and represent alternative perspectives within each case.

*Constant Comparative Analysis*

Merriam (2001) wrote: “the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 18). As an example, she suggested comparing quotations from different people on the same topic. Similarly, I began this study by comparing mission statements, curricular overviews, and course descriptions from various introductory visual art programs. Reading through these documents, I noted similarities and differences between them. I used these emergent themes to focus my selection of cases and subsequent classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups.

While comparison between cases helped me focus my research from the start, during my time in the field I had to concentrate my attention on comparisons within each case. As Stake (2000) reminded ethnographic researchers, the purpose of the case study is to “concentrate on describing the present case in sufficient detail so that the reader can make good comparisons” (p. 444). He recognized that researchers may suggest comparisons that might be made between cases, but argued that when researchers “concentrat[e] on the bases for comparison, uniqueness and complexities will be glossed over” (p. 444). Constant comparison of data within each case helped me build rich case portraits of each program and provided avenues for subsequent cross-case comparisons, which I present in Chapter 6.
Methodological Issue Interlude: Credibility through Member Checks

In total, I spoke with and observed fourteen professors at Carnegie Mellon University and sixteen instructors at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I conducted two student focus groups at Carnegie Mellon University and three groups at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The samples at each school included veteran and novice faculty members. The students included graduates of public, private, and specialized high schools across the country and abroad.

In the portraits that follow, I have concealed the identity of most faculty and all student participants. This was primarily the result of an abbreviated writing schedule that concluded during the summer when I had more limited access to faculty. Connecting with some participants during the academic year was difficult enough and I wasn’t up for the additional challenge of tracking them down in their off-season. Ultimately, I determined that neither the names of those faculty nor the names of student participants were essential to my report. The anonymous quotations I have included could be cross checked with my audio and transcribed recordings of these conversations.

The few faculty members who are named were key informants in my study who played critical roles in the revision of the curricula at their schools. I contacted each of these individuals at the end of the study, sent them a copy of the portrait of their program, and asked for their feedback and permission to use their names in this text. No one hesitated and one person said he would be honored to get recognition for his work (personal communication, August 18, 2007). This member check and the positive feedback I received as a result helped me bring closure to this phase of my research on innovations in introductory undergraduate studio art curriculum.
Conclusion: Portraiture in Progress

The research design I described in this chapter was a work in process. I began to devise it a year before I set out for Pittsburgh or Chicago. I made slight adjustments as I headed into the field in response to the needs of my subjects and unanticipated opportunities. Likewise, in the following case portraits of introductory undergraduate art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago I hope readers will allow themselves to relax their pre-existing assumptions and beliefs about art foundations as they read my impressionistic descriptions.
CHAPTER 4

CASE PORTRAIT #1: CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

Contemporary Curriculum in Context

*Pittsburgh, PA: The Town Andrew Carnegie Built*

Located in the Northwest corner of Pennsylvania at the intersection of the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers, Pittsburgh once served the rust belt as a major site of manufacture and trade. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the success of the Carnegie Steel Company bolstered the city’s economy. Scotland native Andrew Carnegie celebrated the company’s success with his co-workers and the citizens of his adopted hometown in the form of philanthropic projects including public libraries, museums, concert halls, and the Carnegie Technical Schools (est. 1900), now Carnegie Mellon University. Carnegie’s perseverance, ingenuity, work ethic, and charity live on in these institutions.

*Instructional Interlude*

*The third time I visited this section of Concept Studio I: Self and the Human Being we watched and critiqued a dozen one-minute “mind map” iMovies® the students had created. One began with a shot of a computer. Two hands typed on the keyboard as a voice repeatedly read, “Andrew Carnegie came to this country just a kid with a dream.” Slowly the camera panned around the room and faded*
into a series of images illustrating the rise of a new Hip Hop clothing label, “Vitamin X.” By the end, the company became so popular that even veteran Carnegie Mellon art professors were wearing its products. Other examples also explored unique and personal content on students’ minds including anxiety over exams and college life in general as well as getting lost in a large, unfamiliar city. Short but pithy, the videos fostered descriptive, interpretive, and empathic feedback from the class.

Carnegie Mellon University is located in Oakland, a neighborhood east of Downtown Pittsburgh. Each year, over 25,000 students converge on the area to enroll in courses at Carnegie Mellon and its neighbor institution, the University of Pittsburgh. Average annual enrollment of undergraduate and graduate students at Carnegie Mellon is approximately 10,000. Both schools reside on Forbes Avenue, Central Oakland’s main drag, which is lined with a wide range of ethnic restaurants, coffee shops, and bars. The University of Pittsburgh’s Cathedral of Learning, a 42-story tower Gothic-skyscraper schoolhouse, dominates the neighborhood’s skyline while the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History, Carnegie Music Hall, and Carnegie Library enrich the public grounds for comprehensive cultural education.

Echoing his pioneering spirit in technology and business, Carnegie devoted his art museum (est. 1895) to collections of the “old masters of Tomorrow” (CMOA, n.d., ¶2). A review of the museum’s recent exhibition history demonstrates continued commitment to artistic innovation in a wide-range of art and design fields, including film and video. In addition, in 1994 the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh association operates the Andy Warhol Museum dedicated to the work of another hometown hero and Carnegie Mellon
School of Art graduate. The combination of Beaux-Arts and Modern buildings that house Carnegie’s museum complex remind visitors to remember the past as we devote ourselves to the future. This idea is echoed by the Carnegie Mellon University School of Art which strives to encourage students to “engage contemporary issues, ideas and technologies, anticipating the future and utilizing the past not as a safety net but as a springboard” (CMU School of Art, n.d.) for their work.

While Forbes Avenue east of Carnegie Mellon is decidedly urban, the approach from the west is more serene. Tree-lined streets and sidewalks lead to the inviting front porches of 19th century single-family houses made of brick and stone. This is Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood, home of WQED, the nation’s first community-owned educational television station and sponsor of Fred Roger’s long-running children’s program. Though I never heard his name mentioned at Carnegie Mellon, Rogers’ lessons of learning in context and engaging one’s community parallel the social mission and goals of the university.

*Carnegie Mellon University: A Comprehensive Academic Environment*

Like other cities built on the back of the steel industry, Pittsburgh’s economy broke down in the 1980s due to decreased domestic demands and increased foreign supplies. Through investments in technological and biomedical research, however, Pittsburgh has recovered, like “a phoenix, rising up … from the ashes of earlier eras” (Wilson, 2004, ¶1). Carnegie Mellon University, best known for its research in science and engineering, has contributed to these efforts. Walking around the campus, where combined verbal and math SAT scores average approximately 1400 points, I heard
students rattling off complex equations and debating the potential costs and benefits of engineering innovations as often as making plans to go skateboarding or to a party.

Ranked among the top 25 undergraduate universities in the U.S. (U.S. News & World Reports, 2007), Carnegie Mellon prides itself on strong programs, not only in the areas of biotechnology and life sciences, engineering and environmental sciences, but also in the fine arts and humanities. Faculty and students in the College of Art agree this comprehensive academic environment enables the School of Art to “educate the whole student” and is one of the university’s major advantages as a site for postsecondary contemporary art education. The School highlighted this point in an orientation letter for new students:

We offer all the professional training that our name, School of Art, implies, and all the benefits of the university as well. Our students have the advantages of specialized education in the fine arts, and the breadth and depth of studies in the many other disciplines offered on this campus.

One professor put it this way: “The biggest advantage is that Carnegie Mellon is M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) with a huge art school” (personal communication, October 18, 2006). Throughout my visits, I asked students why they chose to study art at Carnegie Mellon over other institutions. Over and over, they reiterated this statement, telling me they were attracted to the opportunity to simultaneously obtain a rigorous visual art education, marked by the receipt of a BFA, and a comprehensive general education.

Faculty also expressed benefits of teaching art within a highly selective university context. They relish the opportunity to work with students who are artistically motivated
as well as intellectually curious. One professor told me she enjoys teaching at Carnegie Mellon because “the students can write, they can read, they have analytical skills, it’s fun, they challenge me” (personal communication, October 17, 2006). Another reported: “I realize how lucky I am that I have a lot of talented and bright students who are art majors. That’s a real plus.” In addition, she said: “I also enjoy having a few who are not art majors” (personal communication, October 19, 2006).

At times, however, it seemed the faculty might have overestimated beginning students’ intellectual capacities. In one class I observed, first year students led their classmates through a discussion of Bourriaud’s (2002) *Relational Aesthetics* though I wasn’t convinced most of them could define aesthetics. While they tried to illustrate his theories of interactive artmaking by allowing the audience to determine the course of the conversation, only one of the facilitators could speak about the text in her own words. When I asked the instructor about this, she focused on the positive aspects of the lesson, hopeful that even if students did not fully comprehend the theories she introduced that they would at least start becoming familiar with critical art language.

Another professor speaking on the relationship of contemporary art and the comprehensive university context suggested:

The ‘skills, historical knowledge and conceptual understandings’ that beginning art students need to learn are largely outside the discipline of art – in the realm of life experience away from schools altogether, and in entirely different fields of study within the academy: history, literature, the sciences, economics, and especially nowadays, communications and informatics. (personal communication, October 14, 2006)
Given the current state of the arts and higher education, in which interdisciplinarity is a ubiquitous claim, his colleague suggested:

We need to keep allowing for research and flexibility and interdisciplinarity to be fostered. And I know that these are all good buzz words, but if you can actually do it, if you can actually get the students not to just use a term from another discipline but actually talk to people in that discipline and find out that they can have dialogues with them, that’s extremely important. (personal communication, October 19, 2006)

Studying art at a comprehensive university or liberal arts college increases the likelihood that such interdisciplinary interactions will take place. Art majors at Carnegie Mellon live and learn with students who are majoring in other disciplines. Working with people informed by different bases of knowledge and experiences may influence the subject matter and media art students choose to approach in their own work. As one professor I observed and spoke with reported:

I have one student now who’s a math major. I’ve had chemistry, computer science… It’s a learning process for them initially and then I think they’re pretty amazed about what the art students do, in terms of how they think. Sometimes the projects are really baffling to them but they enjoy that and so they’re learning in another way. (personal communication, October 18, 2006)

In addition to its university setting and required academic courses, the Carnegie Mellon College of Fine Arts encourages students to take advantage of interdisciplinary opportunities at the university through two alternate degrees—the Bachelor of Humanities and Arts (BHA) and the Bachelor of Sciences and Art (BSA). The major
difference between the BHA/BSA Art degrees and the BFA Art degree is the ratio of art to non-art courses. BFA students take at least 30 art courses and approximately 10 non-art courses; BHA and BSA students are required to take 11 art courses and at least 30 non-art courses. BHA and BSA students usually take one or two art courses per semester. (CMU School of Art, n.d.)

In a given year, nearly half of the students in the School of Art elect to follow one of these routes. As the program coordinator explained to me, “BHA and BSA students have gifts and talents in both the fine arts and humanities and sciences - they basically don't want to give up one for the other” (personal communication, December 8, 2006). Recalling the department’s decision to provide these options, a veteran faculty member told me, “We had that opportunity in the university that in other art schools they can’t do. And that’s pretty much what we’re about. We’re trying to tell our students to go out into the other world” (personal communication, October 18, 2006).

*Educating Students, Benefiting Society*

Carnegie Mellon University was first established in 1900 as a consortium of technical schools—School of Science and Technology, School of Applied and Fine Arts, School of Apprentices and Journeymen, and School for Women. They collectively took the name Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1912 at which time the schools began granting four-year degrees. The name Carnegie Mellon University was adopted in 1967 following endowments for studies in business and computer science from William Larimer Mellon, the founder of the Gulf Oil Corporation (CMU, n.d.). Today, the university aims to nurture the development of “great thinkers with varied backgrounds who] collaborate toward practical goals. It preaches collaboration and innovation across
traditional barriers of knowledge, producing extraordinary individuals who leave their mark on the world” (CMU, n.d.b).

Carnegie Mellon’s commitment to civic engagement was recognized in the report “Saviors of Our Cities” published by the New England Board of Higher Education (Gerson, 2006). Inclusion on that list was determined by ten criteria. These included: the institution’s longstanding involvement with and catalyzing effects on urban community partners for social and economic change including the impact of payroll, research, and purchasing power on local economies; faculty and student community service; and increased access and affordability for local students to attend college through K-12 partnerships. The School of Art promotes the idea that artists can participate in such efforts:

The social mission of the School of Art is to provide the world with diverse, inquisitive and informed artists who utilize artmaking in a variety of ways to approach a resonant relationship with society and who can sustain and continually renew the vitality and relevancy of art; and connect to society through the work of its students, faculty and staff – locally, nationally, and internationally. (CMU School of Art, n.d.)

Art in Context, a course required of art majors in their junior year, ensures that students will participate in some form of community-engaged art making activity before graduation. This junior year requirement encouraged me to reconsider when foundations are taught. Though traditionally considered introductory courses, the fact that this
courses is required of all students suggests that its goals and objectives are as fundamental to the academic, artistic, and social missions of the School as those taken in the first two years.

The Campus of Carnegie Mellon provides students with a space of their own without isolating them from the surrounding community. No walls or gates prohibit access into or out of the campus. Pedestrians are free to explore the grounds and corridors of the buildings, most of which maintain a sense of their industrial era history.

**Instructional Interlude**

*I walked with a Concept Studio III: Systems and Processes class from Doherty Hall to Forbes Avenue. There we found two students, dressed from head to two in white with the palms of their hands painted red, standing on top of wooden platforms they constructed in the woodshop and set on either side of the street. As the traffic signals changed, the students directed pedestrians by acting out the “walk” and “don’t walk” gestures that appeared on the lights beside them. Ironically, as we watched, a person dressed in a chicken suit, a walking advertisement for a restaurant, crossed the street punctuating the students’ efforts to disrupt this common system of communication.*

As other university founders of his era, Carnegie planned to use his school’s original buildings for manufacturing if his educational plans failed. As a result, movement across campus is directed by a series of paths that efficiently connect one building to the next, demonstrating the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Few trees offer shade for daydreaming or paths for meandering, though these can be found in abundance in Schenley Park that runs along the university’s southwest
perimeter. As a high school senior, I applied to Carnegie Mellon. Ultimately, I attended a school in Massachusetts with more ivy-covered halls. When I returned to Carnegie Mellon in the fall of 2006 to conduct research for this project, I was immediately reminded of the regulated feelings I had there on my first visit. One seeming contradiction to this pragmatic aesthetic, the College of Fine Arts, fulfills the form follows function paradigm in its own way.

The College of Fine Arts: Respecting Tradition, Encouraging Innovation

The College of Fine Arts includes five schools offering degrees in art, design, architecture, music, and drama. Like other Carnegie cultural centers down the road, the College’s main building displays respect for the European Academic artistic tradition even as its studio arts program supports experimentation. Visitors enter through a vaulted doorway labeled CREARE (Latin for to create) into a hall adorned by mosaics that depict St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the Parthenon in Athens, Donatello, Mozart, Shakespeare and other classical European buildings and figures. Just above the doorway, like new arrivals to the canon, is an image of the Buddha, the Sphinx, and a Pittsburgh skyline.

Women and their work are largely absent, relegated to the university’s Margaret Morrison School for Women whose entrance announces: “To Make and Inspire the Home – To Lesson Suffering and Increase Happiness – To Aid Mankind in Its Upward Struggles – To Ennoble and Adorn Life’s Work However Humble – These are Woman’s High Prerogatives.” In 2004, a Carnegie Mellon University fifth-year scholar student created an installation titled “Women’s Voices in Higher Education” as a response to the Margaret Morrison quotation. Noting its limited perception of the possible roles for women in the world, the student searched through the university’s archives and
conducted interviews with alumni to represent the diverse challenges Carnegie Mellon’s alumna confronted in school and after.

The School of Art is headquartered on the 3rd floor of the College of Fine Arts. The school’s classrooms in this building support drawing, painting, computer-based art, art history, and concept studio courses. Individual studios for faculty and students on the 4th story are well lighted by pitched glass skylights. These alcoves simultaneously provide the invigorating feeling of being in a greenhouse while maintaining a sense of mystery often associated with attics and artists. Additional facilities for 3-dimensional and printmaking productions are housed in the lower levels of nearby Doherty Hall. The upper floors of that building are devoted to engineering and chemistry classrooms and laboratories. That building’s hillside location provides unexpected natural sources of light to the subterranean art rooms.

These models on display in the College of Fine Arts lobby stand in stark contrast to the current undergraduate student population in School of Art, which is largely female and of Asian descent. Each year, the School of Art accepts 45 new students who work towards a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree. They are primarily first year students although some routinely transfer into the School from other programs at the university. The year I visited, 2006-2007, the freshman class was composed of 41 women and 4 men. As with any program, administrators and faculty could not provide any single reason for the highly disproportionate composition of this roster. They routinely cited some combination of who applied, who was accepted, and who accepted their offer to attend as potential causes.
A sizeable percentage of the first year female students were from South Korea. This presented subtle challenges to the School’s goal of providing “a stimulating creative and social environment” and “tight community” where “it’s difficult to be anonymous” (CMU School of Art, n.d.). In my observations, cultural differences between students with regard to classroom behavioral expectations combined with language barriers challenged some faculty and student interactions. I noticed some professors were visibly aggravated by reticent international students. As a result, one routinely asked for comments from the “ESL section” following lively exchanges by other students in the class. Another confided to having a hard time telling Korean students apart. “Honestly,” she told me, “I have trouble seeing the difference in their looks.” This situation is not unique to Carnegie Mellon. Increasing demographic diversity is one factor influencing calls for foundations curriculum reform across the U.S.

The School of Art at Carnegie Mellon has recognized this change. In what one faculty member described as “heated discussions” (personal communication, February 7, 2007), faculty had candid conversations about the challenges they faced in their classrooms related to students’ cultural backgrounds. In the spring, representatives of three international student service offices on campus met with the faculty to recommend effective ways to work with East Asian students. Though I did not attend that meeting, I was on campus the week it took place. Even veteran faculty who complained to me the day before that they had been teaching international students for years, including as exchange professors in other countries, reported they gained new perspective on the situation through the discussion. For some, the most thought-provoking part of the meeting were the contrasts
between what the group identified as ideal student characteristics, including critical, unpredictable, and gregarious, and expectations for student behavior in South Korea which have traditionally demanded deference to instructors and adherence to traditions.

Despite such challenges, the School has continued to foster a sense of community and individual recognition through, for example, the regular display of student work. In addition to hallway exhibitions, various galleries and display cases for 2-, 3-, and 4-dimensional works reside throughout the School’s learning corridors. The Frame, a student run, non-profit space, occupies the first floor of an apartment house on the edge of campus and Future Tenant, an alterative project space in downtown Pittsburgh, was opened in 2002 by graduate students in the Arts Management program in cooperation with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. The Regina Miller Gallery, which is prominently located in the Purnell Center for the Arts, across from the heavily-trafficked university center which houses its own small exhibition space, provide wider public access to the campus’s contemporary art scene.

**Considering Current Curriculum**

The introductory studio art curriculum at Carnegie Mellon encourages development of and respect for craftsmanship as well as conceptual thinking about art. These goals are represented by a refrain repeated in promotional materials for the school which describes its curriculum as “an expansive and inclusive approach to art and artmaking” (CMU School of Art, n.d.). When I made my first trip to Carnegie Mellon’s School of Art the third week of the Fall 2006 semester, a variety of first-year students’ work lined the walls. That work illustrated the two types of introductory courses provided at the school. A series of large-scale, craft paper silhouettes leading up one of
the main stairwells in the College of the Arts intensified my curiosity about the thematic Concept Studio classes which first prompted me to include Carnegie Mellon in this study. Still life and contour line drawings illustrated the more traditional objectives of the technical and media-oriented Foundation Media courses. (Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the two-year sequence of required introductory studio art courses for students in Carnegie Mellon’s School of Art.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Foundation Media Studios</th>
<th>Concept Studio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall I</strong></td>
<td>2D I: Drawing</td>
<td>I: Self and the Human Being</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Electronic I: Computer Art</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring I</strong></td>
<td>2D II: Drawing</td>
<td>II: Space and Time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3D I: Ceramics, Welding, Wood*</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fall II</strong></td>
<td>2D III: Painting</td>
<td>III: Systems and Processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>EMS II: Video Art</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring II</strong></td>
<td>2D IV: Serigraphy, Lithography, Intaglio*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3D II: Foundry, Metals, Construction*</td>
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*: 5 week cycles

**Figure 4.1.** Chart outlining introductory courses required in the first and second years of the BFA program at Carnegie Mellon University.
Foundations Media Studios: Multi-Media Impressions

While the thematic, non-media specific Concept Courses at Carnegie Mellon are innovative first year requirements, the Foundations Media Studios are relatively traditional. I asked faculty in the program if they could imagine an introductory curriculum program devoid of formal and media-based instruction, a curriculum comprised solely of Concept Studios. Teaching-artists of varying ages, with various educational backgrounds, whose personal work encompasses a wide-range of disciplines, responded with a resounding, “No.” One professor argued:

The languages of the media are important and can’t be negated or else they're not available to use. … But if you don’t have other spaces designated along the way to actually practice and learn the possibilities of any media’s vocabulary it becomes difficult and a reduced ability to carry out sophisticated ideas in a given form. Other modes develop, but at a sacrifice.” (personal communication, October 16, 2006)

According to the School of Art’s website, the Foundations Media Studios “…ensure that all students have an exploratory experience with every medium available in the school. They also serve as preparation for advanced studio work” (CMU School of Art, n.d.). By the end of their sophomore year, art majors at Carnegie Mellon take a total of eight Foundations Media Studios in a variety of disciplines that introduce them to practices in the three areas of concentration available at the school – painting, drawing, and printmaking (PDP); sculpture, installation, and site-work (SIS); and electronic and time-based work (ETB). Some students told me they were happy to be learning how to
work with materials they never imagined using before. One excitedly told me and her classmates during a focus group:

I’m so far from what I used to be doing. It’s kind of incredible I’m starting to learn all these new things other than drawing, I didn’t know anything. I had never painted before. I never made sculpture before. I had never used metal and big scary things that I could blind myself with. It’s pretty intense. (personal communication, February 7, 2007)

Not all students and faculty share this enthusiasm about the number or content of these courses. Some students admitted feeling like they were just sitting through requirements until they could “do what they wanted.” A few faculty members criticized the sequence as an impossible attempt to be exhaustive. Regardless, over the course of their first two years beginning students are exposed to a wide range of media and art forms. While the Foundation Media courses emphasize media exploration and the development of technical skills, content is also ever-present.

*Instructional Interlude*

As I entered the studio, 2D Media I: Drawing I students set up their easels and were ready to work. As the room filled with early morning light, the students sipped coffee and nibbled on pastries as the professor reviewed plans for the day that she had written on a chalkboard at one end of the studio. The students set to work drawing plants the professor set up or other objects they selected from a closet filled with still life objects. The exercise required them to observe and record the negative shapes around the objects using pencils and ink washes. As the class worked, the professor and graduate teaching assistant met with students
individually to critique their sketches for an out of class assignment called “Precious/Refuse” which required them to juxtapose imagery of valued and undervalued objects in their life worlds. The two assignments represent the range of work this professor requires of her students.

The 3D Media Studio II: Mixed Media students were conducting independent material research studies when I visited their class. Each was working with different materials including tea bags, candy wrappers, embroidery supplies, and blue button-down shirts. When I asked what they were working on, students told me they were preparing to create objects that related to their bodies in some way, using two found materials. In individual and group discussions about their investigations, the professor asked them to consider: “How will your body relate to this piece of equipment? What will this device enable you to do? Will this device function in relation to a specific site?” The student working with embroidery materials planned to stitch statements in Hindi and wear them on her stomach, playing with the idea of trying to follow one’s gut instincts while living bilingually and biculturally. Even when viewers were exposed to this artist’s thoughts, unless they could read Hindi, they would remain in the dark about her hopes and fears. Another student was using a sewing machine to attach blue-collar shirts as part of an exploration of issues related to her father and brother’s as coal miners. The professor listened to students’ ideas and material discoveries before making recommendations and providing the names of artists they might investigate.
On my second visit to their class Electronic Media Studio I students were sharing and critiquing one-minute “Soundtrack to a dream” collages. Each student’s piece was played as the class listened on, often intuitively and audibly responding to moments that stood out. Students found sound samples in the Digital Resource Center and on the Internet, and used additional sounds they recorded themselves including claps of thunder, wind, and rainstorms, gunfire, crying babies, slamming doors, applauding audiences, Hip Hop dance beats, and tea kettle whistles to evoke places, actions, and events. Classmates responded to the mood set by each piece and the imagery it conveyed. They also posed questions and made recommendations about the technical makeup of the piece. After some discussion, they listened to the piece again, contemplating their classmates’ remarks. For a subsequent project, the professor planned to have students create one-minute animations or live-action sequences based on a classmate’s sound collage.

Curriculum development is about making choices about what, when, and how students will learn. Mary Stewart (2004b), a nationally recognized foundations educator, program director, and textbook author noted: “In my foundation consulting work, I am impressed by the inclination of most departments to continually add to the foundation curriculum without ever taking anything away” (¶12). At first glance, the two-year sequence of required Foundation Media Studios at Carnegie Mellon University seems to fit this observation. A veteran professor suggested, however, that this curriculum
supports the belief that “it’s developmentally unwise for students to make too narrow choices too soon” (L Burgess, personal communication, October 18, 2006). He explained that prior to the current requirements, students took only a few introductory courses and then selected an artistic discipline that they studied rather exclusively. This ran counter to his notion that “we are trying to prepare people in a much larger way, to a much larger world and to have a much bigger role creatively in it. We don’t pretend that we are preparing finished painters or finished anything.”

Other faculty I spoke with supported this professor’s interpretation of the Carnegie Mellon University School of Art’s overall mission. In this sense, the Foundation Media courses are recognized as a significant part, or core, of the BFA program, not simply as a preliminary hoop to jump through. Another professor for example, reiterated that “creative flexibility, rather than a professional title,” (personal communication, October, 19, 2006) was the guiding objective of the BFA program. However, he and others also questioned their program’s extensive introductory requirements. They suggested that some things have to be relinquished (printmaking was frequently targeted for elimination) to provide more time for studies of new modes of making and advanced studies in elected disciplines. The faculty at Carnegie Mellon have made this kind of tough choices in the past. In the early 1990s, for example, the School of Art discontinued its glass arts program to make more room for more computer art courses. No doubt similar compromises will be made in years to come.

*Concept Studios: Conceptualizing Artmaking*

Despite the specific identification of the Media Studios as foundation courses, faculty in the Carnegie Mellon School of Art agree that Concept Studios I, II, & III are
part of their introductory curriculum. Additional Concept Studios in the junior and senior
group include Art in Context and Senior Project. The first three courses introduce broad,
non-media-specific, cross-disciplinary themes like Self and the Human Being as frames
for research and artmaking. One professor described the themes as a “meta-curriculum”
(personal communication, December 6, 2007) which develops alongside students
beginning with studies of the self and moving to considerations of bigger Systems and
Processes.

The Carnegie Mellon School of Art course catalogue explains that Concept Studio
courses are: “organized around structured assignments designed to assist the student in
developing a personal, non-medium-specific approach to generating art as well as in
learning transferable conceptual skills.” Not bound to any specific media or art form, the
faculty who teach these courses develop sub-topics and assignments that allow students
to explore the content and medium of their choice. Students are encouraged to make
formal choices that complement the content and context of their work. In these ways,
assignments emphasize the generation of ideas, both technical and conceptual, as a
foundation for contemporary work in art and design. Learning to generate ideas is also a
major objective of first year courses at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
described in the next chapter.

An examination of various documents revealed more specific objectives for these
courses. A syllabus for one section of Concept Studio III: Systems and Processes (Fall
2006), for example, included this summative aim: “Analyze the often-overlooked
structures and forces that underpin the world as we know it and utilize this awareness for
the creation of mind-blowing works of art.” According to the School’s guidelines for
Concept Studio, these structures might include “systems of the sciences, linguistics, mathematical, environmental, industrial, governmental, [and] formal systems in the arts.”

**Instructional Interlude**

*I joined this* section of Concept Studio III: Systems and Process on the first day of a project called “Battle of the DIY Bands.” The professor explained, “Trying to start a band is the ultimate experiment in social systems.” For this jam session, each student in the class brought a homemade instrument and one-minute composition for that instrument, written in a notational system she or he devised. Instruments included high-heeled shoes stamping on baking sheets, ripping duct tape, stepping on dry cereal, and releasing air from balloons. Four or five students performed their pieces individually and then as a group. Once all the instruments had been introduced, bandleaders were selected. These students then selected band mates in a manner reminiscent of children at recess choosing teams for kickball. The groups were given one week to collaboratively explore their materials and compose a new piece before the final battle.

As I suggested in Chapter 2 and will discuss further in the sixth and final chapter of this dissertation, grappling with themes such as systems and processes may constitute part of a 21st century foundation for artistic practice. Themes also play a major role in the First Year Program curriculum at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago described in the next chapter. At least for the present moment, broad concepts with potential for inter- and intradisciplinary investigations seem to be the best way to introduce students to the pluralistic nature of the contemporary artworld.
This two-track curriculum is the legacy of Bryan Rogers who was the Head of Carnegie Mellon’s School of Art from 1988-1999 and is currently the Dean of the School of Art and Design at the University of Michigan. During his time at Carnegie Mellon, Rogers led efforts to design and initiate the Concept Studio sequence. Rogers told me, “Ideally all courses would offer a balance of media and concept, the two entry doors to creative work. Ultimately, both media and concept are required, but Modernism led us to a love-affair with media” (personal communication, January 9, 2007). Rogers and his faculty collaborators conceived the Concept Studio courses as designated spaces for students to work on the development of ideas, where knowledge and experiences from “the media studios, advanced studios, and academic courses -- are brought to bear upon art-making projects pursued in this aspect of the program” (Rogers, 1992). In conversations about this study before and during its undertaking, people often recommended that I look at the foundations program at the University of Michigan. I was happy to tell them that I was aware of that program and that it’s history resides at Carnegie Mellon.

A self-defined “educational missionary,” Rogers helped his faculty rewrite the “preliminary courses for how creative people would be educated in a broader sense” (personal communication, November 9, 2006). His use of open-ended terms like preliminary courses and creative people rather than foundations and artists support his opposition to “standardizing terms that codify practices and stifle creativity.” His attention to a broader sense of education belies his recognition that people often display creativity in the spaces where fields overlap and intersect.
Not surprisingly, Rogers’ own background is interdisciplinary. He earned advanced degrees in engineering as well as art. His philosophy on introductory undergraduate education for creative work reflects these influences. Rogers believes “universities are rich environments with many opportunities that artists have not tended to take advantage of” (personal communication, November, 9, 2006). He is not alone in this opinion. As I discuss in the next chapter, a revision to the foundations program at the University of Florida enacted at the same time as changes at Carnegie Mellon was also designed to inspire art students to think and study more broadly. The Concept Studio curricula Rogers helped establish at Carnegie Mellon and later at the University of Michigan encourage art students to embrace the academic freedom provided by their institutional context, to explore literary, psychological, philosophic, historic, and natural science content in and through their art.

Rogers found a kindred spirit in Carnegie Mellon University art professor Lowry Burgess. Burgess began at Carnegie Mellon in 1989 as Dean of the College of Fine Arts. The two first met at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies. In Boston, Burgess worked primarily at MassArt (also known as Massachusetts College of Art & Design) where he helped orchestrate an interdisciplinary art program in which students explored a single topic, like The City, through concurrent studies in literature, history, and studio art. During that time, Burgess also helped conduct research on first year college students’ responses to various learning objectives and experiences through the Harvard Office of Tests. He reported:

One of the things we found out about first year experience is the events that leave the biggest track in students minds are being away from home for the first time
and being responsible for oneself, then all that socializing stuff around making of friends and love relationships was number two. A very distant number three is the curriculum. (L. Burgess, personal communication, October 18, 2006)

Burgess’s approach to teaching first year students reflects his awareness of their ongoing processes of personal and artistic development and relationships between these areas.

*Instructional Interlude*

*The first day that I visited Lowry Burgess’s section of Concept Studio I: Self and the Human Being class was September 11, 2006. Burgess noted a connection between the date and the topic his class was investigating—memory and language. As each student shared memories from that date five years before, we learned about their backgrounds. One student spoke of her experience living in Brazil where she overheard suggestions that the attacks were warranted. A young man of Egyptian decent spoke about the prejudicial harassment he and his family suffered in North Carolina. Another student admitted that she mistook footage of the event for a movie because she was new to the U.S. and did not understand English and the imagery was so surreal. Many of the students complained that teachers and administrators at their junior high schools shielded them from the news, denying them an opportunity to ask questions and respond collectively. Burgess invited students to talk candidly to one another about their experiences and related them back to the concept of memory, which the class was exploring. “It all makes me wonder,” he queried aloud, “What is the shared*
memory of all of us in this room? How is this moving the memory of the nation or the world? How is the nation digesting this year to year and turning it into cultural memory?”

It was not clear whether Burgess would encourage or require students to explicitly use these stories as fodder for artmaking. The point of the exercise, it seemed, was to create space for students to discuss memories and hear one another’s voices. Meeting an objective listed in his syllabus, this exercise provided students an opportunity to “reduce your inhibitions, expand your verbal and listening abilities along with your ability to improvise resources for your artworks.”

As previously mentioned, Rogers is currently guiding efforts to educate artists at the University of Michigan. A cursory examination of their curriculum guidelines reveals many similarities with the program at Carnegie Mellon. Burgess now serves as the Chair of the Concept Studio Committee at Carnegie Mellon. In my observations, his colleagues appreciate the perspective his knowledge of art education history and theory bring to discussions of curriculum and pedagogy. Junior faculty regard him as both a mentor and a peer, someone who has institutional memory but is not resistant to change. Indeed, when I attended a meeting of the Concept Studio Committee, Burgess himself suggested: “After 15 years [with the current Concept Studio curriculum], I think there’s agreement that we need to take a look and ask what might be missing as a result of changes in the art world and at Carnegie Mellon” (personal communication, December 6, 2006).
Media and Concept: Two Sides of the Same Coin

While the curriculum is designed so that you work primarily on the form of art in the introductory media studios, and on ideas of art in the concept studios, concept and execution are really just two sides of the same coin. (from a Drawing I syllabus, Fall 2006)

Perhaps not surprising, given the divided nature of the foundations curriculum at Carnegie Mellon, some faculty perceived inconsistencies between students’ technical and conceptual development and their ability to use these skills in combination. One media professor confided that

Some students have come to me and said that with some faculty it doesn’t matter what you do, how well executed it as long as you can justify what you did. They tell me that as long as you can get up there and bullshit about it really well, you’ll be all right. They may come and say that to me because they know that I try to demand execution that’s well resolved too. (personal communication, October 19, 2006)

Students and faculty at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago were also concerned about bullshit. Indeed, bullshitting in class critiques is a pervasive concern that Elkins wrote about in Why Art Cannot Be Taught (2001) and Daniel Clowes dramatized in Art School Confidential (2006). In response to his students’ frustration with bullshit, one Carnegie Mellon art professor asked his students to read On Bullshit (Frankfurt, 2005), a short treatise on the subject by the former Princeton University philosophy professor. The objective of this assignment was to help students better understand what bullshit is and what it is not, why it exists, and how it can be of use in creative thinking.
In my observations, form and content were both addressed in Foundation Media and Concept Studios. Following published course descriptions however, emphasis was placed on technical skills and the properties of materials in the Foundations Media Studios while assignments in Concept Studios focused on content research and conceptual development. In both cases, the relationship between form and content was addressed in project proposals and final critiques of student work.

The perceived disconnect between the conceptual and formal development of student artwork at Carnegie Mellon was explicitly addressed during a concept Committee meeting I attended in December 2006. Faculty in attendance discussed various concerns related to the content and results of the Concept Studios on their own and other BFA requirements. One professor noted:

I see high quality technical abilities and ability to conceptualize, but not both together. …They seem to have picked up, subliminally, a separation [between skills, content, and art history]. If you polled students, 30% would say Concept courses are about how to make Conceptual Art” (personal communication, December 6, 2006).

His point was that the term Conceptual Art refers to a specific artistic movement, generally associated with artists like Bruce Nauman and Lawrence Weiner working in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than a way of thinking about and approaching artmaking. The issue is more than semantic and suggests that the name of courses can make a difference in how faculty teach and what students learn. As Henry Giroux has suggested “creating new language is both an urgent and central task today in order to reconstitute the grounds on which cultural and educational debates are to be waged” (Giroux, 1992, p. 3). As I
discuss in the next chapter, the impact of course titles also emerged in my observations at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The thought that students might confuse the objectives of Concept Studios and the particular goals of Conceptual artists inspired a series of recommendations for renaming these courses. *Critical* was disregarded because the term is just as prone as concept to misunderstanding. *Integrative*, a term already in use in the MFA program at Carnegie Mellon, was a more popular recommendation. The Integrative Graduate seminar is designed to integrate the three components of the MFA program: the School of Art base, the community affiliation project, and the university academic affiliation. Also integrates the discourse of School of Art academic seminars, studio practice, and visiting artists/critics in a critique driven environment. Venue for the critique of students' work and practice through oral and written presentations. (CMU School of Art, n.d.)

While no final decisions were made at this meeting, most recognized potential benefits to using parallel language in graduate and undergraduate courses. Perhaps this would serve as a reminder that skills like learning to balance attention to form and concept are developed over time.

*Conclusion: Making Complexity Coherent*

The introductory studio art curriculum at Carnegie Mellon University is by nature an amorphous phenomenon. Supported by their comprehensive university context, faculty expose students to a wide range of ideas to work from and lead them to disciplinary boundaries to transcend. Much more could be said about Media and Concepts Studios taught in name of foundations at Carnegie Mellon University. No
matter how much I write, however, I would never be able to provide a complete
description of what goes on in this program with one foot in the past and another in the
future, one arm in Pittsburgh and another in the global society.
CHAPTER 5

CASE PORTRAIT #2: THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Contemporary Curriculum in Context

Learning in The Loop

Andy Warhol prophesied that one day all department stores would become museums, and all museums would become department stores. Downtown Chicago illustrates the fulfillment of his prediction. The Loop, an area loosely bound by a circular route in the city’s elevated train system, is home to Marshall Field's Department Store, now Macy’s®, an homage to product design and commodity fetishism. This twelve-story shopping mecca, and the storefronts which surround it, offer a seemingly endless feast for the senses and inspiration for students of art and design. Chirping birds testify to the lifelike sounds produced by Bose® stereos, arrangements of cooking supplies illustrate the gospel of Martha Stewart, and the smell of freshly brewed coffee beckons one to the nearest Starbuck’s® barrista.

A flâneur’s paradise, the Loop hosts a range of other cultural landmarks, including the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The school’s affiliated museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, is one reminder of this neighborhood’s history as host of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, an earlier celebration of art and industry. The fair marked the city’s architectural and economic renaissance following The Great Fire that leveled
the area in 1871. Architecture throughout the Loop bears the mark of the Beaux-Arts style promoted at that time. Block after block is lined with buildings adorned by intricate pilasters, friezes, cornices, columns, gargoyles, and entrances crafted out of unique combinations of stone, brick, granite, plaster, metals, and glass. These are the places that Louis Sullivan, Mies van de Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright built.

Public artworks provide an additional source of visual stimulation for students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the 44,000,000 tourists who visit the city each year (Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, 2007). Many are the products of world-renowned artists like Anish Kapoor, Jean Dubuffet and Mark Chagall. Others evince Chicago’s own community-art tradition. During my visits for this project, for example, the local collaborative You Are Beautiful sponsored a project on the scaffolding of a construction site in the Loop for which Chicago-area artists contributed small panels, each in the shape of an individual letter of the alphabet crafted out of materials and adorned imagery representative of each artists’ style. When combined, the letters spelled out You Are Beautiful in various languages.

Bombarded by this wide range of visual art and culture, first year students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are clearly not lacking inspiration. As Bruce Jenkins (2006), Dean of Undergraduate Studies, asserted in a note to potential students, the city of Chicago is one of the School’s most important, yet immeasurable, assets. In my review of course syllabi and observations of classes in the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I noted various faculty efforts to help students navigate and begin to make sense of their new cultural landscape – transforming it into fodder for artmaking rather than a cause of over-stimulation.
Instructional Interlude

A professor led the students in her Surface section of Core Studio Practice onto the sidewalk outside the School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s Sharp Building. A few blocks down Monroe Street, she stopped. Standing in the shadow of the Inland Steel Building, the first skyscraper built in the Loop following the Depression. The professor noted its exterior steel skeleton that allowed designers flexibility in laying out the interior spaces. She reminded the class that they were embarking on a series of walks through the Loop as motivation and research for their final project following the theme “Flat City” and encouraged students to “assert your individuality” and “be mindfully, visually present of everything around you.” Then she led them down streets, through plazas, and into the lobbies of buildings stopping periodically to give them a chance to record distinguishing things they noticed in the environment on photocopied maps she’d distributed and to compare the colors they saw with color swatches they had painted in earlier color mixing exercises and carried with them.

A Wealth of Resources

Since 1994, when U.S. News & World Reports began ranking graduate programs in fine art, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago has routinely ranked number one in the nation along with Yale University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Although undergraduate programs at independent art schools are not ranked, the school’s legacy, location, and graduate reputation draws approximately 450 new first year students
each fall. Admissions are based largely on portfolios and interviews rather than academic tests and ranking. Applicants are required, however, to score at least 500 points on the verbal section of the SAT.

The School was founded in 1866 by a small group of artists as the Chicago Academy of Design in a building at the Southwest corner of Wabash Avenue and Monroe Street (SAIC, 2006). The academy was renamed The School of the Art Institute of Chicago around 1880. Like other urban schools with no distinct campus, the School is seamlessly integrated into its surroundings. Without knowledge of its existence or general whereabouts, a passerby would likely do just that, pass it by.

The School currently occupies all or part of six buildings scattered throughout the Loop. The First Year Program is housed on the third and forth floors of the Sharp Building on the Northeast corner of Wabash Avenue and Monroe Street, diagonally across from the School’s original site. The building is only a few blocks from the School’s two dormitories, which 80% of first year students call home (SAIC, 2006b). Four train lines stop half a block away, providing students and staff easy access to myriad points around the city.

*Instructional Interlude*

*I listened with the mind of a cultural tourist as a professor asked his Research Studio I students to “plan their own field trips” to various neighborhoods throughout Chicago. He asked them to use public transportation – including at least two different subway lines and one bus – and reminded them of the Chicago Transit Authority maps they received during orientation. In the syllabus, the professor specified intersections in eight different neighborhoods that he briefly*
described to the class. Students were asked to choose two sites from this list. The instructions also included the following prompts: “Look for an ethnic or group identity in each of these locations. Take 10 digital photographs that identify the iconography of each place. Using iPhoto® crop, alter, and merge 2 images that show the contrast between neighborhoods.”

In addition to the aforementioned public resources available to them, students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago have access to a wide-range of institutional resources. The Art Institute of Chicago, the School’s affiliated museum the museum houses an internationally-renowned collection of over 250,000 images and objects from around the world and across time. The founding missions of the school and the museum were indistinguishable. The Art Institute’s first holdings were plaster casts used as drawing subjects in the School following the French Academy model discussed in Chapter 1.

Various other galleries and exhibition spaces throughout the School’s building’s provide ongoing displays of work by professional and student artists. Visiting artists give lectures in various settings on a daily basis. One first year student I spoke with, voiced his appreciation for such opportunities:

In the painting class I had last semester we’d have readings on artists a lot and then they’d come lecture at the Art Institute which was really awesome because it’s like you can read about Elizabeth Peyton or someone but when you actually see them, it’s not just a glorified art star, it’s a real person. (personal communication, April 10, 2007)
Libraries and resource centers provide access to collections that compliment and expand upon the holdings of The Art Institute of Chicago. General circulation volumes and special materials include exhibition catalogues, magazines, artists’ books, and vintage clothing.

**Instructional Interlude**

_I joined a Research Studio I class in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s Joan Flasch Artists’ Book Collection on the 5th floor of the Sharp Building. The students were gathered around two tables covered in books of varying sizes, shapes, colors, and materials. One of the librarians shared a short history of artists’ books and the collection of such works available for study. She suggested the students consider how the production of hand-made publications might enable them to “take the dissemination of your work into your own hands…with a book, you can have more freedom without being bound to a gallery or a specific medium.” Students spent the next forty-five minutes looking at a range of books made by contemporary artists including both international art stars and former students at the School. They looked for pleasure, to get ideas for their own artwork, and as preliminary research on artists they would report on later in class._

Technical resources including woodshops, kilns, darkrooms, printing presses, weaving looms, foundry, sewing machines, and digital recording equipment are available to support students’ creative urges. This is another one of the School’s major selling points. As one instructor who was also a former student at the School noted: “That’s what’s so amazing about this place. As a student you have access to anything you can
possibly imagine” (personal communication, October 25, 2006). Through orientations required throughout the First Year Program, and elective courses taken in the fall and spring semesters, students become acquainted with some of these resources.

Institutional Interdisciplinary Initiative

Curriculum at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is generally built on the belief that:

Creativity is the currency of our time. The demand is incredible for those who grasp the complexity of our culture and can make a contribution of their own. They are the makers of the images, words, objects, and sounds that shape and forever alter our world. (SAIC, 2006c)

This mission belies concern for innovation in context. It suggests that artists do not create work out of a vacuum but in response to and as part of the cultures in which they live.

One way the School endeavors to promote creative innovation is by encouraging students to design their own, interdisciplinary courses of study. Unlike other independent colleges of art and design, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago does not require students to work towards degrees named for professional areas of art design, for example painting or fashion. Rather, “At the heart of the SAIC undergraduate education is a commitment to interdisciplinary study and the awareness that the boundaries between artistic fields are surprisingly porous” (SAIC, 2006c). Following this interdisciplinary guiding philosophy, beginning with Core Studio Practice, one of the two courses which make up the First Year Program at the School, students are encouraged to explore a range of disciplines and media in search of novel integrations of traditional processes and
products to create new forms. To earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree, undergraduates must complete distribution requirements in studio art, art history, and liberal arts. The number of credits required in each of these areas may differ dependent upon the degree one seeks, for example, BFA in Studio, BFA with Emphasis in Writing, or Bachelor of Interior Architecture. Beyond the First Year Program, however, undergraduate course selection is completely elective. In fact, students’ elective coursework begins their first semester at the School.

This self-directed course of study is a major reason why some students choose to attend The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. “One of the reasons I picked this school is because you don’t have to have a focus, because it was interdisciplinary. I could do everything or something.” (personal communication, April 10, 2007). Another echoed this point, “I don’t what to be restrained to a field. I’m going to touch base on as much as I can. I want to graduate and be able to do whatever I want. I don’t want to have a title and I hate when people lay out ‘I’m a painter’” (personal communication, April 10, 2007). One student suggested:

I think it’s good that the school forces, well it doesn’t force, it encourages combining areas because I think that’s where art’s going. . . . It just makes the work better. It makes you a more informed artist. (personal communication, April 10, 2007)

These students were eager to embark on a general course of study with experiences in a wide range of media and techniques. While their parents might cringe at these seemingly indirect plans, these are just the kind of attitudes toward artmaking—understood as creative problem solving and risk taking—that the School hopes to promote. As the
School’s curriculum overview stipulates, it’s credit/no credit grading policy is an embodiment of this belief: “a structure that enables faculty to push students harder….to take risks and try new things. In [this] system, faculty can focus on students’ creative development: it’s about process, not just outcome: (SAIC, 2006c).

Regardless of the School’s interdisciplinary mission, however, departments and courses at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are organized by media-based designations like drawing and painting, ceramics, and performance. Course sequences recommended by these programs pay homage to the disciplinary traditions that most instructors were educated within and provide structure for students who need or want it. I found a similar tension between tradition and innovation in the introductory art program at Carnegie Mellon University where beginning students take two sequences of courses organized around technical and conceptual objectives. This seems to be a sign of healthy skepticism with the status quo without disregard for what can be learned from the past.

Some first year students I spoke with seemed happy to have these traditional disciplinary designations to follow, and some conveyed plans to pursue focused studies in one or another artmaking discipline. During focus groups, I heard a lot of comments like, “I do photography,” “I’m hoping to get into the fashion department,” and “I’m in VisComm.” In the current curricular structure, students take one elective course in each semester of their first year. Students generally reported that they enrolled in electives courses in the area—drawing, photography, fashion, writing, etc.—that they were already interested in before and upon arrival at the School. With open-ended interdisciplinary
exploration a hallmark objective of the School and its First Year Program, an introductory curriculum that promotes boundary crossing and experimentation is a fundamental necessity.

Interdisciplinary creative activity requires an ability to “think analogously” in order to connect form and content. First Year Program Director Jim Elniski described analogous thinking as the ability “…to perceive the common characteristics and qualities of two very different, officially, subject matters” (personal communication, October 24, 2006). He explained why this type of thinking is important to introduce early in an art student’s education. “One, it expands the plasticity of ideas; shows that ideas are mutable. And two, once you make that analogous bridge you have access to different knowledge bases to enrich the ideas that you have.” The current curriculum for the First Year Program, which Elniski helped design and institute, belies his belief that promoting analogous thinking is a foundation for contemporary creative practices and seems an apt compliment to the School’s overall mission and curricular objectives.

Catalysts of Change

Mark-making in the 21sts century

Computer technology and the hypertext mark-up language (HTML) used on the Internet are exemplary tools for analogous thinking. In Fall 2004, simultaneous to introductory curricular changes described in this chapter, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in conjunction with the First Year Program began a laptop initiative that requires all incoming students purchase an Apple® laptop computer. The First Year Program website suggests: “This central piece of equipment is our 21st-century pencil, a tool that underscores the inter-connectedness of research and artmaking, of sound and
image, of text and writing. It is at the center of a truly transdisciplinary education” (SAIC, 2006d). Recognized as such, computers are used throughout the First Year Program as means of research, communication, artmaking, and exhibition. I discussed innovations in digital technology as a driving force in curricular revisions in introductory undergraduate visual art education in Chapter 2 and will say more on this issue in relation to my two case portraits in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Inspiring Leadership

Given the relatively open approach to artmaking and art education at The School, the finite objectives of a traditional Foundations curriculum never quite fit comfortably within its overall curriculum. As a result, over the past few decades the School has explored a variety of introductory structures. At one time, students enrolled in a series of 5-week rotations through various studios, for example, woodshop and printmaking studios. More recently, before the 2004 revisions that led to the curriculum I studied, students took a relatively familiar sequence of 2D I (Drawing), 2D II (Drawing and Color Theory), 3D, and 4D courses. The courses were offered out of individual departments. For example instructors from the Drawing and Painting department taught 2D courses. No explicit attempts to connect content or experiences from one course to another was required and students did not always complete the series of courses their first year, if at all. According to stories gleaned from faculty who were once students at the School and others who taught in older introductory curricular structures, those classes were considered graduation requirements or prerequisites for advanced studio electives as
much, if not more than fundamental introductions to universally relevant concepts (personal communication, October 24, 2006; personal communication, October 25, 2006).

In the Fall of 1997, Helen Maria Nugent was hired as the first full-time director of the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Prior to her appointment, full-time faculty members from various departments in the School oversaw introductory course offerings for three years, on a rotating basis. Not surprisingly, they were often most invested and concerned with the introductory course offered in their own department. Nugent came to the School from the University of Florida where, beginning in 1992, she helped develop, coordinate, and teach the introductory visual art program there — Workshop for Art Research Practice, commonly referred to as WARP. WARP is relatively well known amongst Foundations coordinators as a model of innovative introductory undergraduate art education designed to warp or change students’ preconceptions about art and artists.

In an article about WARP (Catterrall & Nugent, 1999) and in conversation with me, Nugent described that program, and the changes she helped institute at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, as a direct response to the concerns and needs of art instructors and students at each school. At the University of Florida, a comprehensive university:

The faculty felt that something was lacking in the curriculum. That students’ work was very well crafted but was lacking in terms of content. So they came up with a series of questions they thought students should deal with right away, rather than stumbling upon at the end of the curriculum. Like, what do artists do?
What do artists make? How do artists talk about their work? Where do you see art? What can I do as an artist? (H. M. Nugent, personal communication, October, 26, 2006)

In response to these concerns, Nugent and her curricular collaborator Kate Catterall helped conceive a curriculum that required students to think about these questions and respond to them through their work. Nugent explained how the training she and Catterall received as graduate design students at The Glasgow School of Art in Scotland required them to study a wide range of psychological, philosophical, social, literary, and historical theories. This prepared them not only to think broadly with regard to their own work but also to consider potential cross-disciplinary, or analogous, benefits of studying art in a comprehensive university.

The Workshop for Art Research Practice Nugent and Catterall instituted at the University of Florida is a one-semester, nine-credit hour course, consisting of studio sessions; lectures delivered by faculty from a wide-range of fields including psychology, film studies, law; and critical discussions about artistic practices and lecture topics. Nugent and Catterall drafted studio projects that reflected the subjects of the lectures and provided students with opportunities to explore 2D, 3D, and 4D fundamental concepts. The projects were discussed and fleshed out with other instructors, mostly graduate teaching assistants, who taught different groups of students on a rotating basis. This simultaneously provided students with consistent introductory assignments and diverse instructor personalities.

This three-pronged approach (studio, lecture, discussion) was designed to enable students to “assess their preconceptions about art and consider their role as artists within
a cultural context” (Catterall and Nugent, 1999, p. 5). Although this statement echoes the mission and objectives of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Nugent didn’t intend to duplicate WARP because the institutions are inherently different. After her first year in Chicago talking with her new colleagues, however, she:

kept hearing the same kind of thing I was hearing in Florida like, ‘students know how to make stuff, but they don’t know what to make.’ ‘Why do I have to give them these projects?’ And my question was always, ‘well what do you do in your second year classes? Can’t you help them with that? And they really thought it had to be something taught from the beginning. (H.M. Nuugent, personal communication, October 26, 2006)

Students were also unhappy with the status quo. “I constantly had students sitting in front of me in my office saying, ‘I did AP drawing. I don’t need to take 2 sections of [introductory] drawing. I would rather take figure drawing methods in the painting department” (H. M. Nugent, personal communication, October 26, 2006).

Nugent gathered faculty teaching introductory 2D, 3D, and 4D courses and asked them “How do you get ideas?” People described a range of processes including sketching on the street, watching movies, and walking around the grocery store. They began to categorize these processes and think about where they learned them. Most said they just came across them at some point. Nugent wondered:

…could we help students get there a little more quickly so it isn’t this really drawn out experience? Can we give them a range of ideas so we’re not telling them how to be artists but we’re saying this is how we practice, these are some of the things you could do everyday to help your momentum and it’s not a secret. …
And that was one of the requirements—that students had to be engaged in a variety of methods even if they weren’t ones that [instructors] personally advocated. (personal communication, H. M. Nugent, October 26, 2006)

Ultimately, Nugent established a new course in The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s First Year Program called Research Studio. In that class, students would explore different processes for doing visual research in relation to organizing themes such as “Home,” “Normal/Not Normal,” and “History in the Making.” The course was first introduced as an adjunct to the extant 2D, 3D, 4D foundation requirements, as a replacement for the second 2D course. Instructors teaching the course were required to incorporate some introduction to color theory to make up for what was previously covered in the lost 2D II.

Instructional Interlude

I met Research Studio II: Looking at Animals in the Fashion Resource Center on the 10th floor of the Sharp Building. The Director of the collection introduced the resources available at the center through examples related to animals—dresses, coats, hats, shoes, and jewelry made with real and artificial fur, hides, feathers, and bones and catalogues from the collection that highlighted designers who worked with similar materials or designed clothes otherwise inspired by animals and nature. She broached the topic of animal protection laws and questioned the use of camouflage as a pattern for children’s clothing. On the use of excavated ivory she suggested, “If the animal’s been dead a long time, it lives on in the beauty of adornment.” As she spoke, she demonstrated passion and enthusiasm for the complex nature of the fashion world’s relationship to the animal kingdom.
Her words were intended, in part, to inspire students to “Design a product for domestic use based on a single species, [incorporating] ideas about the animal’s structure and the utility of that structure [as well as] mythical and social ideas about the animal.”

Building off Nugent’s work and leadership and working with the insight of faculty curriculum committees, First Year Program Director Jim Elniski launched a new curriculum in Fall 2004 comprised of two courses, two semesters of Research Studio and a new course called Core Studio Practice.

Considering Current Curriculum

Research Studio: Researching Inspiration

As previously discussed, Research Studio is intended to support each student’s conscious development of an artistic practice, particularly the generation of ideas, or concepts, for projects.

In Research Studio, students explore methods of investigating historical, cultural, political and social contexts surrounding a project. They learn to use research to generate ideas, to connect form to content, and to realize projects. With the help of faculty directed assignments, they begin to develop their own studio practice.

(SAIC, 2006d)

Since the 2004 curriculum revision in The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s First Year Program, students complete two semesters of Research Studio. Research Studio I offers a general introduction to the notion that research fuels artistic production and
opportunities to practice various visual research methods. In Research Studio II, students implement methods introduced in the first course in a sustained response to a single theme, like those listed above.


Students also meet individually with their Research Studio instructors to discuss personal challenges and triumphs. As one instructor observed, given the wide range of interests and abilities of first year students at the School, this time allows instructors to mentor students individually, suggesting ways students might personalize course assignments. She told me:

They need to have a place where they just focus on their own strengths and weaknesses and how to improve. I think they need that individual attention. As a group you can introduce a variety of artists and bring their attention to things they haven’t seen before, but individually they have such specific questions about their own practice that you can’t address them all in one room (personal communication, October 25, 2006).
In Research Studio I, students conduct general explorations of various research methodologies and create work in response to that research. Faculty design their own projects assignments for the course but are required to involve students in the following activities: archive or collect, organize, and store inspiring ideas; research the life and work of an established artist; and practice critique as a means for evaluating and developing ideas and related projects.

**Instructional Interlude**

*Students arrived at Research Studio I with bags and boxes full of objects they had been collecting for two weeks. Their professor had asked them to bring 3 different collections with twenty or more items in each one. In the syllabus for the course, she supplied some ideas including images/objects that “inspire you, with formal similarities (shape, color, size), with similarities of use or function, that function as a ‘self-portrait’ or ‘portrait’ of someone/something else.” I watched as the students unpacked and arranged Polaroid® pictures of people from the waist down and strange business signs, cosmetics, empty water bottles and soda cans, hand-written notes and postcards, candy wrappers, cups filled with different textured objects, and other fodder for future projects. The class discussed each collection beginning with an explanation of why the student compiled it, moving on to the creative potential of its formal characteristics and conceptual associations. The student who brought in the water bottles, for example, was interested in how many different companies try to uniquely package and sell bottled water when, at least in this country, you can drink relatively safely from*
most faucets. Her next challenge would be to figure out how to transform this bottle collection into a work of art through documentation, modification, or display.

Research Studio assignments like collection archiving and research papers on established artists help students generate inspiration and raw materials for future work. The development of expectations and methods for critique are practiced on projects in process for other courses and carried into students’ interactions outside of class. As one student suggested:

A lot of people come in here never having experience with like critiques. It’s the teacher’s responsibility to teach students how it works and the responsibilities of the student and what to expect. Because that’s really important and you really kind of don’t know what you’re doing unless you do it a lot or someone explains it to you. (personal communication, April 10, 2007)

The two-course Research Studio sequence “is designed to move students from a general introduction to more focused, student-centered, studio-based research within a particular topic area” (FYP Instructor Curricular Guide, 2006-2007). Therefore, Research Studio II sections are organized around themes like “Deep Fried Twinkies,” “Seeing Double,” and “The Seven Deadly Sins.” The topics stem from instructors’ personal and artistic interests, knowledge of trends in the contemporary art world, and their knowledge of first year students interests. As with works of art, the titles of these courses seem as important as the content in drawing students’ attention. One instructor explained her process for developing “Normal/Not Normal”: 
[The idea] came because I also happen to have a daughter who was going into art and was exactly the same age so and I knew exactly where their heads were at. They’re either interested in sex, identity or shocking visual material…. Basically it was looking at a lot of this that are gross, ghoulish, disgusting, and strange and then we also looked at the idea of normal/not normal through identity, as well.

Basically I took what students were most interested in coming in, and used it as a way to talk about spectacle and reductive strategies… (personal communication, October 23, 2006)

Research Studio I and II are non-media specific classes. Students are encouraged to use whatever form or media best suits the concept they are exploring. One student described her understanding of how such conceptually-based work develops: “You have to have the thought and the work has to come from that thought” (personal communication, April 10, 2007). During Research Studio II critiques, emphasis is placed on students’ ideas and their visual representation.

**Instructional Interlude**

*The instructor for Research Studio II: Politics, Propaganda, and Protest began class with an animation he found on the Internet illustrating the rise and fall of real estate prices in the United States since 1890 plotted as a roller coaster ride. The video was an appropriate precursor to the class’s critique of works generated using examinations of “the numbers ratios, or statistics that inform our world.” Once they arranged their work for review, the professor assigned each student another student’s work and gave them twenty minutes to write a response to be shared with the class. Students set to work examining, describing, and*
interpreting an animation depicting the contents and side effects of drinking Coca-Cola®, a pop-up picture book illustrating children working in the sex industry, and a coloring book, large-scale drawing, and installation of altered baby dolls all relating to casualty statistics from the war in Iraq, amongst other installations. After twenty-minutes, the students shared what they wrote as introductory remarks in a more traditional, oral critique.

Research methods introduced in Research Studio compliment other studio courses including, for example, the second course in the First Year Program, Core Studio Practice.

*Core Studio Practice: Aiming for Interdisciplinary Introductions*

Core Studio Practice was designed to provide “an interdisciplinary investigation of technical practice and conceptual and critical skills common to various areas of creative production” (FYP website, 2005). Like the University of Florida’s Workshop for Arts Research Practice discussed earlier, *Core* (as students and faculty refer to it) was first introduced, in Fall 2004 as a one-semester marathon of introductory exercises and experiences in various two-dimensional, three-dimensional, time-based, and collaborative modes of making art. The term core offers an interesting alternative to foundations, suggesting the introductions students receive in this class might form the center of their future work, rather than the basis for it. While a base suggests upward growth, a core can develop in many directions.

Since its inception, the structure and objectives of Core Studio Practice (and to a lesser extent Research Studio) have gone through annual revisions. According to those I spoke with, as well as an article in the School’s student-run *fNews Magazine* (Carating,
alterations to Core have been made in response to comments gleaned from a variety of sources. Student opinions have been collected, for example, through course evaluations and focus groups administered by the Office of Student Affairs.

The day-long, collaborative teaching structure of Core Studio Practice encourage faculty members to eat lunch together. Throughout my visit to the school, groups of instructors gathered for lunch around a small table in the First Year Program office to nourish their bodies and minds sharing stories of student successes and instructional strategies. Comments from these informal discussions as well as formal faculty meetings have been taken into account.

Finally, institutional concerns and mandates regarding availability of space and access to facilities have had an impact on revisions. In other words, a combination of artistic, pedagogical, and practical concerns have prompted ongoing reform. These changes, indicated in the chart below (Figure 5.1), belie the reflective practice and leadership of the faculty and administrators in the First Year Program. Without such flexibility and willingness to reflect upon and revise the curriculum, the School’s attempts at introductory undergraduate studio art education would not be possible.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CORE STUDIO PRACTICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># semesters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mtgs/week (9 a.m. – 4 p.m.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># instructors/core</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#students/core</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH STUDIO</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># semesters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mtgs/week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours/mtg</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(plus additional time for individual and small group meetings, field trips, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1. Comparison of credit hour distributions in The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s First Year Program in the 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 academic years.

On my final trip to the School in April 2007, however, faculty repeatedly expressed hope that the structure of the program would remain the same in the 2007-2008 academic year. It seemed they were reaching the limits of how many times they are willing to revise their syllabi and lesson plans and they are interested in seeing how different groups of students respond to the same strategies. In other words, they want some control group to compare their work against.

In its first iteration during the 2004-2005 school year, Core Studio Practice faculty teams of four instructors met with sixty students twice a week, from 9am-4pm,
and experimented with ways to organize them and to introduce them to required course content. One instructor recalled:

It was very difficult to get four people to agree on curriculum ... Basically [in our group], everyone laid out projects and then we all taught each others’ projects all at the same time. So we broke our Core down into 15 students per instructor and created this kind of collaborative syllabus where I created one project, the others each created one project, and then we all taught under that umbrella and each person did the lecture that introduced their project to the large group. (personal communication, October 25, 2006)

As this instructor candidly admitted, it was difficult for individual teaching teams to decide which learning objectives should be given the most attention, how to introduce the material, and how to capitalize on their expertise and limited time with students. Different sections tried different strategies and structures, shared their experiences, and eventually adopted the standard model described below.

By Fall 2006, when I began visiting the First Year Program, Core Studio Practice had been extended to two semesters and broken into four seven-week rotations. Three faculty members were assigned 45 students whom they met with in both one large and three smaller groups, once a week from 9am-4pm with a one-hour lunch break from noon to 1pm. Rotations were formalized around modes of making related to surface, space, time, and collaboration. Based on his or her own artistic pursuits, each instructor was assigned responsibility for teaching the entire Core, in groups of 15 students at a time, in surface, space, or time. In this way, each Core operates a bit like its own intra-institutional school with resident experts for students to consult with in various areas. A
concluding rotation involves all faculty and students in collaborative and individual capstone projects. Figure 5.2 illustrates the sequence of Core Studio Practice rotations used in 2006-2007.
Rotation One (seven weeks)

Rotation Two (seven weeks)

Rotation Three (seven weeks)

Rotation Four (seven weeks)

Concluding: The Collective Project and The Culminating Project

Figure 5.2. The flow of students through Surface, Space, Time, and Concluding rotations in Core Studio Practice, one of two courses that comprise the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Core Studio Practice Instructors’ Curricular Guide, 2005)
Structuring Inter-disciplinary Objectives

Specific objectives published for each area – surface, space, time, and collaboration – inform faculty of the objectives they must meet. These are fairly similar to the goals of traditional foundation courses. For example, during the surface rotation students are expected to develop a basic understanding of color including formal, psychological, and cultural aspects thereof. Through their studies of space, students are expected to develop understandings of positive/negative and other spatial relations including working with and creating objects inside of and outside of specific contexts. Finally, in time rotations, students explore the potentials of performance, sound, and video as forms for documentation and manipulation.

In addition to these kinds of conceptual understandings, the space and time rotations provide technical instruction, orientations and authorizations for using equipment in those areas. In space, students learn to use a sewing machine, hand tools and stationary machines in the woodshop, and plaster casting equipment. In time, students are introduced to audio and video recording equipment including microphones and lighting as well as equipment for editing material they generate using those resources.

During each rotation, the Core is united in its approach to these objectives through an overarching non-media specific theme. In other words, every seven-weeks, a single topic, like “Duplicity”, “Mapping”, or “Confrontation” is introduced and explored in all-Core meetings and activities as well as independently in projects in the surface, space, and time sections.
Instructional Interlude

During the first rotation in Fall 2006, I observed a team of Core Studio Practice instructors and their students explore artistic possibilities related to the concept “Real/Fake.” At times during this rotation, the entire Core met to look at work related to the theme. The space instructor shared examples of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades. The time instructor played short films including Mitchell Block’s (1974) “No Lies” and Ant Farm’s (1975) “Eternal Frame.” Students in each group were expected to contemplate these examples in relation to the work they were assigned in individual groups.

During a subsequent all-Core meeting, I saw work representative of the surface, space, and time groups’ final projects for the “Real/Fake” rotation. One surface student shared a series of drawings derived from an image of her hometown in South Korea derived her GoogleEarth®. For this assignment, students created three drawings – one in black and white exploring the expressive function of value and line variations, another depicting the inverse of the original image in a monochromatic palette composed of a single color plus black and white, and the final combination of these techniques. The drawings were formally interesting and well-made. Students said the challenge of this project was sticking to a set of rules and watching how it impacted their creative process as well as the resulting work.

A student from the space rotation presented her response to the plight of the urban pigeon population. Appropriating the model of duck hunting decoys, the student created pigeons out of plaster and wood, two materials introduced
through orientations in the space rotation, and painted the forms to mimic the colors and texture of what some city dwellers call flying rats. She brought her constructions into the streets where she photographed their interaction with the space, passersbys, and real pigeons. The project involved thinking about conceptual, site-specific, and installation issues in addition to the construction of 3-dimensional objects.

An example that stood out from the time rotation was a video documenting a student reconstructing the Chicago skyline out of Legos®. The majority of the video was shot in stop-motion style with a close-crop on the artist’s hands at work on her growing structure. At the end, the camera panned out to show the blocks in relation to the actual skyline. All the while the sounds of the city added a sense of reality to the developing forms.

The fourth and final rotation in Core Studio Practice is devoted to collaborative and independent culminating projects. The First Year Program curricular guide requires students gain familiarity with a variety of historical and contemporary models and theories for working collaboratively. They also recommend student artist collectives devise manifestos and submit proposals for projects as part of their process for creating collaborative work. The faculty for each Core I observed approached this assignment differently. Some assigned students to working collectives others let the students choose their own collaborators. Some assigned students topics and media to work with while others let students decide the content for themselves.
Instructional Interlude

When we entered the studio, two model stands had been arranged to form a stage. An eight-foot tall backdrop featured a border of white balloons and a hand-painted image of two birds holding up the ends of a banner that read “God Save the Queen.” Two male students dressed in white shirts and pants and calf-high combat boots, with large white cardboard circles covering their faces, walked on stage carrying hand-painted images of machine guns. Processional music came over the sound system as a female student, also with her face covered, walked on stage and took her place behind a podium. She lip-synced to a recording of her own voice reading the lyrics of the Sex Pistols (1977) song “Liar.” As she finished, drums and guitars kicked in and the performers ripped down the backdrop to reveal a concert stage image, flipped their guns around to reveal guitars, tore off their shirts, and began to dance wildly around the stage. The audience banged their heads to the music, held up lighters, and cheered their classmates on.

As the group explained in the critique following their performance, the piece was a response to prompts they were given by their instructors. Each group in this Core was handed an envelope containing the name of a band, a location in Chicago, a material, a phrase, and a color. This group’s project grew out of their research on the Sex Pistols’ (band) response to the Vietnam War (a related memorial was their site) through lyrics of the song Liar and the similarities
between political events and of that time and 2007. Students were allowed to disregard or replace prompts as they deemed necessary. For example, this group did not incorporate any glitter in their project.

In addition to collaborating with their peers, first year students use the final weeks of Core Studio Practice to revisit and revise projects created earlier in the year. This is one of many ways the First Year Program teaches students that art is not generated in a vacuum, that ideas beget ideas, and work is always in process. As I heard one instructor tell her Research Studio students, ‘It’s about work coming from work coming from work.’

Core or Cram

In my visits and discussions with students and faculty, Core Studio Practice was a consistent point of critique. As with the Foundation Media requirements at Carnegie Mellon, some students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago were not initially enthusiastic about having to study disciplines outside their major areas of interest. Most came to appreciate, however, the range of experiences they were provided in Core Studio Practice and Research Studio. Students told me: “In high school it was only like painting and drawing. Being able to expand is really good and to find new things to work with.” And “It’s good because it keeps you making things but it’s a little overwhelming to switch from different areas so quickly, like making a painting and then a sewn sculpture” (personal communication, April 10, 2007). Others were less confident about this quick succession of introductions:

I think that the rotations in Core are based on this hope that people are going to taste different parts of the school and I think that’s not a very good thing to have
when you’re coming in - there’s too many things at one time. There’s not enough
time to settle in on it, but just enough time for them to cram everything down your
throat. (personal communication, April 10, 2007)

Some instructors I spoke with echoed the latter students’ concerns about time.
One woman who taught the introductory 3D course in the old system and now teaches
space rotations in Core suggested, “the disadvantage is that there’s not enough time for
full development. They’re getting a little smattering of some stuff” (personal
correspondence, October 25, 2006). This begs the question: how fully developed faculty
should faculty expect a student be in any one medium or mode of artmaking after an
introductory level class?

In response to instructors pedagogical concerns about time, Core Studio Practice
was extended from one to two semesters in Fall 2006. This change did not result in
increased contact hours. Rather, the class went from meeting twice a week to once a
week. Still, some believe the extended timeline has made a difference in the way
materials and concepts are presented and received:

In the one-semester Core time passed so quickly that they were spending, literally
3 1/2 weeks on a rotation. 3 1/2 weeks to learn an introduction to composition,
color, observational drawing, painting, collage. . . Within that structure, some
students realized they could get away with murder. So, they would turn in some
kind of lazy version of whatever that exercise was. And for my money I can see a
tremendous improvement. The average student is spending more time exploring
plaster, more time exploring color and I think that when you make a trajectory arc over their career, there’s going to be a tremendous benefit from that time explored. (personal correspondence, October 27, 2006)

Another cause for the 2006 Core Studio Practice schedule change was the price of real estate in downtown Chicago. As First Year Program Administrative Director Paul Hopkin suggested, many changes at the School are creative responses “born out of the fact that we don’t have enough space” (Hopkin, personal communication, October 27, 2006). Rather than viewing this as a strike against the School, however, Hopkin said: “One of the modes of this school that makes it an interesting place to work is that some of the most interesting approaches to artmaking or administration come out of problems” (personal communication, October 27, 2006). After the School brought in a consultant to review the institution’s overall spatial efficiency during the 2004-2005 year, changes were required in the First Year Program. At the time, First Year Program facilities were heavily used in the fall but not in the spring. Spreading Core out over two semester opened space for more sections of the course, allowed students more time to work through lessons, and gave them time to take an elective course both semesters. With any luck these reflective revisions will continue. As First Year Program Director Jim Elniski said, “Discussion is ongoing. And it may change, again. We’ll see where it goes” (personal communication, October 24, 2006).

Living with Questions

Elniski constantly reminds his colleagues and students to “live in the question” rather than search for conclusions. This approach to teaching and learning reflects the School’s philosophy that “innovation and renewal in SAIC's curriculum is an ongoing
process” (SAIC, 2006). In one of our conversations Elniski used the story of Silly Putty® to illustrate the benefits of working in this state of mind. He explained that chemists in search of a substitute for rubber originally created the substance. While it failed to serve any practical purpose, it provided amusement for other scientists and later became a popular toy. Similarly, Elniski and his faculty admit that not every structure and strategy they have tried has been an unqualified success. The First Year Program is indeed a work in progress responding to artistic, pedagogical, and practical concerns.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Compare & Share

In this chapter, I return to the guiding research questions I presented in Chapter 1 and the conceptual framework I presented in Chapter 2. Based on my portraits of introductory studio art curriculum at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I offer summative responses to my first two questions—What concepts and skills constitute the foundations of artistic practice introduced at these schools? And, what values, beliefs, and assumptions about art and education inform these programs? Readers might consider how these Brave New Basics relate to their own missions, objectives, and guiding philosophies for introductory undergraduate studio art education, past, present, and future. Responding to the third and fourth questions—How did these curricula come to be and what conditions make these programs viable? And, what might others learn from the experiences of faculty and students in these programs?—I suggest implications of these innovations for the field of postsecondary studio art education. And finally, I offer recommendations for continuing the observations and inquiry presented in this dissertation.
Brave New Basics: A Rough Sketch

A curriculum should outline what students will be expected to know and be able to do at the end of that course of study. A rationale or mission that gave rise to those objectives should also be clearly articulated. I developed case portraits of the introductory studio art curricula at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago to provide narrative, impressionistic overviews of the missions and course content that make up those programs. In so doing, I sought to examine how the definitions of and approaches towards introductory art skills and concepts in those programs are innovative, new and different, relative to the standard foundations curriculum.

In this section, I present descriptions of common objectives for students’ learning in introductory studio art courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I used postmodern artmaking practices and theories of critical pedagogy presented in the second chapter of this dissertation to focus my discussion. My belief that many artists think deeply about the meaning of the images and objects they make guided this analysis of the portraits I presented in the previous chapters.

Roland (1996/2001) identified 13 traits of artistic thinking that parallel objectives I noted in course descriptions and syllabi for introductory courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Roland’s list included “looking at things more closely than most people do… taking risks and exposing yourself to possible failure…[and] arranging things in new and interesting ways” (p. 1). Both of the programs I observed work with students to develop such skills. Among other things, instructors invite students to critically examine the visual cultures in which they live and
the artwork they produce. They expect students to develop ideas and make formal decisions in support of those ideas. And, they provide inspiration and encouragement for students to blur boundaries between previously disparate bodies of work and areas of knowledge.

Readers are reminded that both postmodern artmaking and critical pedagogy are necessarily open-ended and always in-process of becoming. Amidst the pluralism of the contemporary art world, with no overriding definition of art, it is increasingly important that individual schools and the instructors who teach within them be clear about their own definitions of art and its related missions and objectives. Likewise, another researcher might have focused on other concepts and skills students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of these programs or written about them in different ways. I derived the following objectives for introductory studio art education at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago based on my observations of those programs.

Art is always about something.

Art is, and always was, made about or for some thing or some purpose. Even in the late modernist heyday of art for art’s sake, post-painterly abstraction was made to explore the limits of paint as a medium of pure expression. The theme or subject of such work might be described as philosophical or aesthetic. As I discussed in Chapter 2, many postmodern artists have reengaged content with explicit reference to the world outside the white boxes where it is shown. Often, their work is made to be experienced outside the context of museums and galleries altogether.
The curricular innovations at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago described in the previous chapters were devised to address faculty concerns that intermediate and advanced students were prepared to make things, but often didn’t know what to make. Students possessed technical skills but had no ideas for content or contexts to work from. In contrast, proposals for projects and critiques of work in process I witnessed throughout my research emphasized the concepts and intentions behind the imagery on view. One veteran professor at Carnegie Mellon reported that since the introduction of non-media specific, thematically driven Concept Studio courses, “It’s much easier to get students to think about ideas” (personal communication, October, 19, 2006). Conversely, she lamented that “students have come to me and said that with some faculty it doesn’t matter how well executed your work is as long as you can justify or bullshit about it really well.”

As described earlier, Carnegie Mellon’s introductory Concept Studios are organized around concepts or big ideas that artists revisit over time through a variety of processes. Concepts like “Self and the Human Being,” “Time and Space,” and “Systems and Processes” are intentionally broad and seem to connect with most areas of human experience and artmaking. They are umbrellas that harbor a range of other ideas or themes that can be approached from formal, expressive, instrumental, and functional perspectives. For example, many of the themes selected by instructors at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, including mapping, home, and propaganda, could fit within the Carnegie Mellon concepts. These ideas for artistic content may provide students with regenerative foundations for artistic practice they can use to help sustain artmaking throughout their lifetimes.
Instructors in both programs help students navigate and focus on themes and ideas within concepts. In classes I observed, themes and concepts were often introduced through slide talks, videos, and readings. As part of the production of their work, students explored related themes they were already familiar with or learned about through research. As the Research Studio course at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago underscores, research can take many forms including going shopping, conducting interviews, watching movies, reading articles, or visiting museums. The diversity of work produced in the classes I attended illustrated how concepts have the potential to lead artists to several ideas that can be explored in a series of projects.

*Context is critical.*

Concepts and themes invite questions that have multiple answers based on the social, political, geographic, economic and other contexts in which they are investigated. For example, students might examine issues of “Time and Space” through themes like maps or memorials in different times and places. Students might explore questions like: What is a map? What are maps for? How do people make maps? What could I map? In so doing, they may develop a critical awareness of and greater sensitivity towards the relationships between concepts and contexts.

Beginning in their first semester, students at both Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are encouraged to explore personal and public contexts for artmaking. The Concept Studios at Carnegie Mellon begin with introspection and move onto examinations of broader structures that influence daily life. Similarly, faculty in the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago require students to share their prior knowledge and experiences in art and to familiarize
themselves with resources and inspirations available at the school and throughout the city. Later, students are encouraged to approach their work from a contextualized perspective.

For contemporary artists, contextual concerns are both general and specific. In addition to considering cultural contexts that influence the development of the form and content of one’s work, context must also be considered in terms of exhibition. Students demonstrated awareness that working out in the world beyond the studio was an option. At both Carnegie Mellon and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago I saw many proposals for site-specific installations and documentation of such projects during class critiques. This was, in part, a response to the artists that instructors introduced in slide talks and the projects they assigned.

One instructor who taught the now defunct introductory 3-D course at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and now teaches “Space” in the School’s Core Studio Practice reported that the revised course title has encouraged her to focus more on context. She lamented, however, what she perceived to be an over-emphasis on context in the contemporary art world and the sculpture department of her school.

I get very excited when I go to a museum and see an object. I’m like, ‘yeah people are still making this. It still exists!’ Sculpture students here are being blown out of the water with public art about engagement and that’s kind of the nature of our sculpture department. It’s all about public art actions and installations. And that’s not to say that I’m not interested in space either. I
always had one component that dealt with site-specificity and the history of space and site – so I’ve been trying to think a little more into the realm of space.

(personal communication, October 25, 2006)

This instructor’s comments suggest that just as too much focus on form has been blamed for a deficiency of ideas, overemphasis on contextual issues may impede consideration of other aspects of a piece.

*Utrecht® is not the only place to buy art supplies.*

Some have argued that studio art faculty at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are too concerned with their students’ conceptual development and not enough with their technical abilities (Feindrich, 2005). Others counter that concept and form are inextricable and contemporary artists must be prepared to “weave webs of meaning” (A. Crocetta, personal communication, August 8, 2007) within and around their work. Since the 1960s, artists working in the legacy of Duchamp have taken up an infinite range of media from ant farms (Yukinori Yanagi) to apple pies (Anissa Mack). These are not traditional media bought in art supply stores. These are conceptually grounded media essential to both the form and meaning of work.

Wittenbraker (2003) noted, “while concept almost always leads to a consideration of form, form can become an end in itself and does not necessarily lead to a consideration of concept” (31). Artists who use non-traditional media must be prepared to justify their choice through both the work itself and in artist statements.

At both of the schools I studied, I consistently heard students and faculty discuss relationships between what their work was about and how it was made. Students were encouraged to consider the historic and cultural contexts of the materials they chose to
work with. In other words, they were encouraged to pay attention to, interrogate, and exploit the stories that materials convey. Often the media students chose to work with were dictated or inspired by the forms their work would take, be it a traditional art form or something borrowed from a vernacular or ethnic context. At The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, for example, one student transformed the tradition of coloring book line drawing into a series illustrating statistics related to the war in Iraq. Playing with the perceived innocence of coloring books, he demonstrated how children learn through play. His work also provided commentary on what children are told about war and what they are shielded from.

Material studies were part of the first preliminary course at the Bauhaus. Those studies were, however, focused on a search for the essential material properties of media. Postmodern material studies stretch beyond the look and feel of media to investigate the previous meaning and use of objects. One *Instructional Interlude* in Chapter 4 included a description of a 3D mixed media course in which students selected, explored, and exploited the cultural as well as material aspects of various media. In Chapter 5, I described a similar attempt to encourage this kind of exploration that required students to collect 20 objects or more in 3 categories. In both cases, students discussed the reasons for their material selections and talked with their classmates and instructors about their responses to them. In so doing, all participants expanded their archives of potential materials as well as their ability to interpret the meaning of media used in other artists’ work.
Question authority and own your vision.

Other faculty members at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago also asked students about what they collect. One instructor suggested that by asking students about what they like to do she gives students permission to explore personal interests and inspiration that a lot of students “have never thought about in connection to their artistic process” (personal communication, October 25, 2006). For this instructor and others I spoke with, the greatest hindrances to students’ developing creativity are their preconceptions about what subjects, materials, and processes are considered valid in regard to artmaking. She admitted that she has jokingly referred to undergraduate foundations as “deprogramming….to force students to let go of their previous notions about artmaking and to reinvent, and to rethink because that’s the only way they can be really innovative is to loosen those borders.” Students seemed to grasp this lesson. As one told me, “teachers don’t want people to come in here and just have this central idea about what they’re going to do. They want you to touch everything” (personal communication, April 11, 2007).

Giving her students permission to draw on their personal influences and hobbies as fodder for artmaking, this instructor encouraged her students to question the authority of their previous definitions of art. Those understandings are influenced, in part by students prior art education including their experiences preparing portfolios for college admission and AP Exams. Such work is made to fit neatly in standard categories like drawing and photography. It is highly refined and tends to look like something you’ve seen before, for example, drawings of shoes, ceramic teapots, photographs of cemeteries.
Foundations instructors I spoke with described this work as *safe* and complained that students treated as precious evidence of what they had accomplished rather than marks of future potential.

Introductory studio art instructors’ frustrations with their students’ limited knowledge of contemporary art forms and experiences working alongside and outside tradition was not purely intellectual. They were concerned that students were not prepared to work on their own, to take risks in determining how their work would develop, or to revise their work. These instructors strive to empower their students to determine for themselves what they might create rather than provide them with highly specific assignments. They want to teach students to pose problems rather than simply solve them. One professor uses herself as an example to encourage beginning students to take control of their own work: “There’s no one out there giving me assignments. I go out there and I make stuff that I’m pursuing. That is my personal vision and that’s how you function as an artist in the world” (personal communication, October 25, 2006). Because The School of the Art Institute of Chicago has no grades, such self-motivation must be learned early.

A related lesson encourages students to look to their past and present work for future possibilities. During the all-Core final critique at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago described in Chapter 5, I heard an instructor ask the class to consider how they might “cannibalize their work” (personal communication, September 21, 2006). Like his colleague quoted in the portrait who tells her students to consider “work coming from work coming from work,” he was trying to encourage his students to consider not only revising specific pieces but also how they might revisit and reconnect with the form and
content of their work in subsequent projects. This relates to my earlier discussion of themes as regenerative subject matter and serves as a reminder to students that their work and practice is always in process of becoming. This is particularly true of non-media specific artists who may engage new media and processes with every project. Those individuals must be prepared to identify their interests, articulate their needs, admit their ignorance, and seek help to learn new skills.

*Play well with others.*

In my observations undergraduate art students were not as cutthroat as *Art School Confidential* (Clowes & Twigoff, 2006) or *The Cheese Monkey’s* (Kidd, 2001) would lead one to believe. During project proposals and critiques, students offered one another constructive criticism and suggestions. This kind of collaboration helps students develop critical skills of audience participation that I discuss later in regard to how critiques might be facilitated. It also helps students who start college thinking of art as a solitary means of personal expression and dreaming of art stardom learn that every artist relies, in some way or another, on a network of creative comrades.

While the modern era prized the lone genius, postmodernists recognize that their projects often rely on a group of individuals to complete even when that assistance is not readily apparent (Becker, 1982). Artists who employ different media and processes for different projects, for example, often seek the council or services of others to help them realize their ideas (Fineman, 2006). Collaboration has also become increasingly common throughout higher education, including studio art instruction. The First Year Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago includes a seven-week rotation devoted to collaboration. During the spring 2007 semester, Carnegie Mellon faculty organized their
First year students into groups to collaboratively create exquisite corpses. The project was an experiment intended to investigate how collaboration might be introduced in the program in the future.

Faculty at both schools are working to clarify the goals and objectives of collaborative assignments to their students and colleagues. This might reduce complaints I heard at both schools that required collaborative work felt forced, like group work in elementary school. In critical comments that should make their instructors proud, students noted that being assigned partners to work with didn’t reflect the formation of collectives they were presented as models. One student at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago suggested, “In the real world that would never happen. Here are two people you’ve never met before. Now make art” (personal communication, April 11, 2007). His classmate more hopefully observed, “It’s kind of forced but people are making art so that’s good.”

Implications for Postsecondary Art Education

The following is a discussion of implications for postsecondary art education derived from what I saw and what I did not see in introductory studio art courses at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. These are generalized observations and ideas not intended as praise or criticism for either institution or any single instructor. These aphorisms reflect both the objectives I read about in course syllabi and observed in class sessions. They should be read in relation to the above objectives. While they might be considered as recommendations for future research, I offer other, more specific research propositions in the final part of this chapter.
Focus on Foundations

As I suggested in Chapter 1, if foundations continue to require one or two years of students’ time, faculty and other resources should be devoted to making these programs the best that they can be. Because Carnegie Mellon’s School of Art is so small, full-time-faculty teach both introductory and advanced courses. This ensures that everyone takes responsibility for students’ development over time. In contrast, nearly all of the instructors in the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are part-time instructors paid per course with no benefits including little or no contact with upper level students. In spite of these circumstances, the faculty I observed and spoke with at the School seemed thoroughly devoted to making the program work. Echoing my own observations of faculty dedication, one instructor noted:

You sit in the First Year Program (FYP) office and all the faculty are going through this intense struggle—they’re working really hard and they’re talking about it. We all are very dedicated to the program, we work twice as hard as people in other areas and we make shit money. We’re not even a department, there’s like one full-time first year person. We’re in the ghetto over here in FYP. (personal communication, October 25, 2006)

In addition to the poor pay and lack of job security suffered by introductory instructors, many foundations coordinators, often new to their positions and institutions, complain that veteran faculty equally condemn the extant curriculum they inherit and the innovations they propose. If schools continue to require students to fulfill foundations course sequences, faculty and administrators should work to ensure that those programs are well planned, and provided the physical, material, and human resources they need to
thrive. If advanced level instructors are going to rely on what students learn in these courses, they should be involved in planning and teaching them. It should not be acceptable to criticize what is being done at the introductory level without offering help to solve the problems.

Within the last ten years, many schools have created new positions for foundations coordinators. Further research would be necessary to explicate the reasons for this development, what these jobs entail, and the effect coordinators are having on curriculum management and student learning. It is clear, however, that something is changing in the perception and treatment of some introductory programs. Ultimately, more faculty specifically devoted to expanding opportunities, training teaching assistants, and providing instruction at this level are needed.

In addition to better staffing introductory programs, institutions can demonstrate their commitment to beginning art students by devoting space and other material resources like computer labs and woodshops to foundations courses. One professor at Carnegie Mellon University offered the following petition:

It would be wonderful if beginning students could have a room where they would be able to keep their work up, where they wouldn’t have to keep putting it away in some little locker or something. The rooms that we have are communal and while we have space for them to work, not all of them can keep things up. This contributes to the experience of the liberatory quality of being able to work on things over time and realize that things don’t happen instantaneously. (personal communication, October 19, 2006)
Some schools, most notably the Kansas City Art Institute, have spaces specifically
designed and dedicated for foundation studies. Others, including The School of the Art
Institute of Chicago, have devoted classrooms to first year courses. Such spaces not only
guarantee faculty and students places to teach, learn, and create artworks, but they also
foster a sense of community.

Promote Pedagogy.

Increasing the number of full-time faculty who teach foundation courses at a
given institution might, in and of itself, impact time and energy devoted to these courses.
Providing those individuals with pedagogical preparation, or teacher training, however,
could improve their chances of connecting with and clearly communicating objectives to
students. In the past, college and university teaching-artists, mimicking the traditional
master-apprentice system and academic experts teaching in other fields, just showed up
and professed their knowledge and opinions to students (Singerman, 1999). Traditionally
those postsecondary level instructors have been left to their own devices to figure out
how to teach students in their field. Given the opportunity, they experimented with
various strategies as graduate teaching assistants but received little or no guidance on
what strategies worked best in which circumstances. As a result, most people ended up
teaching as they were taught.

Elkins (2001) suggested this kind of instruction generally lacks intentionality, a
critical characteristic of teaching. He wrote, “the teacher must mean to impart something
at a certain moment, and must intend it for a certain audience” (Elkins, 2001, p. 92).
Postsecondary instructors are increasingly expected to make their lessons relevant to the
students they teach and to consider ways to make those lessons more clear. They are
expected to teach, not simply to lecture and demonstrate the use of materials. Attention to instructional strategies, including providing clear expectations for student work and behavior, is particularly important at the introductory level when students are making a transition from high school to college.

While some faculty I spoke with believe first year students are just as capable as advanced students and should be held to the same standards and expectations, most seemed to agree that college freshman are developmentally different than advanced students. As a result their pedagogical needs are different. One participant in this study candidly suggested marks of first year student difference.

They’re sick, they’re on drugs, they’re away from their families for the first time, and they have no idea how to fry an egg so they don’t eat. You’re not dealing with an adult in college. You’re helping them transition. It’s exhausting and very difficult. (personal communication, October 25, 2006)

This commentary harkens back to Itten’s spiritual and psychological goals for the Bauhaus preliminary course (Whitford, 1984). It suggests that first year instructors sometimes serve as guidance counselors on educational and social life choices as much as artmaking mentors.

Instructors who teach Research Studio in the First Year Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago are expected to serve as mentors to their students, meeting with them individually to discuss their interests, goals, and course of study. This practice suggests faculty should consider the needs and interests of the students enrolled in their classes. In addition, instructors’ personal interests and home institutions’ ideals for student learning determine what and how lessons are introduced and activities are
organized. These are a lot of perspectives to consider, particularly for graduate teaching assistants and new faculty who are often hired to teach foundations courses with little or no pedagogical preparation (Gould, 2001).

Increasingly, schools that employ MFA students to teach foundation courses as graduate teaching assistants provide those individuals with some strategies for constructing syllabi, devising lesson plans, and conducting critiques (Collins, 2006). For the past two years, Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE) has sponsored think tanks to develop objectives and plans for such training. Teacher training for MFA students is critical because these individuals are still students themselves. The critiques they participate in with their own classmates are not very different in form from those they facilitate for undergraduates. However, they must be prepared to modify their expectations and language to meet beginning students where they are and teach them something new.

Clearly there is interest in dispelling the myth that art cannot be taught. Pedagogical recommendations for postsecondary studio art educators, however, should be developed around their primary interests—the conception and creation of new artworks and the interpretation and critique of finished pieces and works in progress. The following are a few more developed recommendations for areas where teaching can be improved, based on my observations during this study.

*Enact relationships between theory and artmaking.*

Contemporary artist statements, exhibition catalogue essays, and critical reviews demonstrate the influence of theories derived from other subjects including psychology, sociology, and biology. Because such theory has influenced their own work, many studio
art instructors are eager to introduce it to their students. When they do so, instructors must take the time to figure out how to teach concepts derived from theory rather than assume that simply by reading an assigned text students will grasp the fundamental concepts or raise and reflect on questions faculty consider essential. As Wittenbaker (2001) observed, the educational challenge of introducing relationships between forms and concepts is figuring out how to do this “in a way that enables the class to experience and think together, and doing it in a way that is directly relevant to studio work” (p. 30).

Numerous times during my observations at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago I witnessed situations in which first year students were asked to read theoretical works without being held accountable for explaining their understanding of what they read or whether they had, in fact, read the assignment at all. In the Carnegie Mellon class discussing Bourriaud’s (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*, for example, students sat back as their teachers gave monologues about readings they were assigned but failed to complete. Faculty who take the time to select, copy, and distribute articles should also consider and devise ways to help their students work through the content of those texts and relate what they read to their own artistic inquiries.

Arrigo (2004), for example, determined that McLuhan’s theoretical musings on mass media had something to offer his beginning art and design students. He noted, however, that

McLuhan’s essays are dense with impassioned rhetoric, encyclopedic references and now, painfully dated examples. While personally I find these qualities only add to the appeal of his writing, I also recognize that these essays are far too
unwieldy to assign to beginning students. However, I have found that a few of his key concepts help my design students understand some of the complex ways in which visual images function. (p. 13)

Arrigo recognized that many first year students would not be intellectually prepared to read dense philosophical theses independently. As he suggests, this does not mean they are not ready to explore some of the philosophical concepts introduced in such texts. This realization is the point of departure for teaching. Instructors must be prepared to present students with critical questions, examples of artwork, and assignments that provide students arenas in which to engage theories related to artmaking and interpretation.

Drawing on McEvilley’s “Thirteen Ways to Look at a Blackbird,” for example, Wittenbaker (2001) has students sort objects into categories and provide rationale for their choices. “Interwoven throughout this exercise,” he suggests, “are major issues in philosophy, art, science, epistemology, psychology, art, science, education, and knowledge.” The point, however, “is not to end up with theory, but to refine studio practice” (p. 31).

In another example taken from the pages of FATE in Review, Flueckiger (2006) was inspired by Gude’s (1999) “Color Coding and the Art of Portia Munson” to devise a three-part color project for her students. After collecting and creating assemblages of colored images and objects, students conduct traditional color mixing exercises, and then write ten questions about a single color. Questions like “Who decided money should be
green?” and “If Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy had a baby what color would it be?” (p. 17) suggest relationships between form, content, and theory that students can build on in future projects.

*Facilitate critiques, don’t just schedule them.*

During many of my observations at both Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago students and faculty were engaged in critiques of in-process and completed work. The format of these sessions was relatively the same regardless of the institution or the instructor. Students brought their work to class and hung it on walls with pushpins, rested in on tabletops, or projected it through LCD projection systems. Pieces were addressed individually for anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes. In most critiques the faculty spoke more than the students. They commented on the form and content of the work, providing names of professional artists whose work the student’s work reminded them of, offering suggestions for making the work better, asking the student to explain a part of the work, her process of creation, or intentions. In some critiques classmates provided their own comparisons and recommendations, questions about the form or content of the work, and recommendations for how to do it differently.

Based on the amount of class time typically devoted to critiques, they should be considered and developed as a primary teaching strategy in postsecondary art education. It often seems, however, that students are expected to intuitively understand the purposes and processes of engaging in critiques. On only one or two occasions do I recall hearing specific guidelines presented for what was expected of students during a critique. This is
dangerous because students’ past experiences and expectations for critiques can be very different. For example, one student at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago complained:

I feel like when it comes down to it, people in this program are too concerned about feelings and about making sure that people are growing and learning and that’s bullshit. I came to this school because I was told that it was cutthroat and competitive. And the only thing that I’ve seen is that my art history class is way more cutthroat than any of my classes that haven’t been upper level classes and that’s the one thing that really disappoints me. (personal communication, April 11, 2007)

Faculty should be clear about their goals and purposes for engaging in critiques of student work. Using critiques to teach students to speak articulately about artworks and to gauge audience responses are, for example, objectives postsecondary educators invested in postmodern, critical art making and education might use to focus instruction during critiques.

At some point or another, we all use language to demonstrate our knowledge. Even as artists talk about visual literacy, verbal language influences what they see in the world and that world influences the development of their vocabularies, both verbal and visual. Art does not speak for itself. Artist statements and critical reviews are typically written with words not images. Critiques provide opportunities for faculty to introduce students to formal as well as conceptual language to describe, analyze, and interpret what they see. As one instructor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago admitted to me, however, “because I was still semi-fresh out of grad school when I started teaching, I was
used to graduate level critiques, and so I had to make an adjustment in how I spoke to them and the language used” (personal communications, October 25, 2006). For this instructor and others in similar situations, the pedagogical challenge is finding ways to model comprehensive critical discourse about art without confusing students.

As Barrett (1997b) suggested, critiques should focus on the critical interpretation of works not simply their formal evaluation. Requiring critique participants to go beyond making “I like it/I don’t like it” statements can help artists anticipate what kind of meaning viewers will make of their work. Weintraub (2003) begins *In the Making* with a discussion of artist-audience relations. In so doing, she “proposes that the audience’s expectations, values, tastes, and concerns are not necessarily after-effects or postscripts. [Rather,] they can affect artists’ conceptual initiation of works and their subsequent fabrication of them” (p. 16). Through artistic exemplars, Weintraub presents various aspects of artist-audience relationships including “choosing a constituency,” “communicating with the audience,” and “relating to the audience.” As discussed in Chapter 2, audience relations are increasingly important for contemporary artists. All artists, not only those who work in public spheres, must consider their audiences’ expectations, anticipate positive and negative responses, and be prepared to explicate the goals of their work.

Towards this end, one instructor at Carnegie Mellon requires students to write a summative paper at the end of each project including a brief discussion of their original
idea, their attempts to execute that idea, what compromises they made, what they might have done differently, and how they felt about their classmates’ responses to their work. The professor explained,

they might say, ‘I got a viewpoint that I hadn’t expected.’ That happens a lot, which I think is good. They’ll do something and they think they know what the reaction is going to be and then they get a totally different reaction and that’s a good learning tool because they’ll realize that people are looking at something in a different way which often is the case because they know everything about their project, or not, but everyone else doesn’t know anything about their project and they’re seeing something for the first time and they’re coming with their own baggage. (personal communication, October 18, 2006)

Like contemplation of Weintraub’s (2005) questions, this kind of reflection on critiques is a way to promote students’ conscious attention towards their work.

*Don’t abandon learning by making.*

Most students who enroll in undergraduate art programs do so because they enjoy the process of making things. Learning by making is part of their impetus for enrolling in an art school or majoring in art at a college or university. This point must not be ignored. With all the recent attention paid to theory and critique in undergraduate art foundations, it’s no wonder teaching-artists trained in a different system might worry that art is being talked to death (Gregg, 2003). Even faculty and programs that embrace conceptual goals and objectives for artmaking must endeavor to teach students modes for visualizing concepts and ideas through the creation of visual culture. Gregg (2003) observed
“Finding an approach that allows graduates to participate in the ‘contemporary conversation,’ as one teacher described it, while at the same time equipping them with hands-on training, appears to be on every educator’s mind today” (p. 108). Striking a balanced, symbiotic relationship between thinking about and making art is a goal critical art educators must not abandon (Dockery & Quinn, 2007).

Amidst the pluralism of overlapping contemporary art worlds and within the context of individual institutions of higher education, faculty and students must make tough choices about what skills to teach and what to study. Vying to stay relevant to the widest range of students, departments are wary of appearing to privilege or exclude any particular medium or approach. This is particularly challenging at the introductory level. Ultimately, however, schools must make choices. Carnegie Mellon asks students to devote two years to introductions of a wide range of media, though clearly not an exhaustive selection, and may disappoint some students as a result. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago does not require a full semester of drawing lessons and suffers from student critiques that “First Year Program needs more of an actual foundation course where students learn to draw formally. I like the conceptual approach here but before you can do conceptual work you need a technical foundation” (personal communication, April 11, 2007).

Gregg (2003) noted that “non-degree schools such as the National Academy of Design fine-arts school report an increase in ‘remedial’ students, who have graduated from art programs but who want to refine their painting or drawing skills” (p. 109). For some, student concern and desire for drawing skills is a vestige of an earlier era. But
until students are presented with concrete alternatives for creating art that appeals to their tangible desires, they will continue to ask for such training. One professor at Carnegie Mellon University suggested:

In a way it doesn’t matter what skills they’re learning. Just so they’re really stretching themselves and building some muscles. I wonder sometimes if you’re a young artist and you’re not sure what you want to do but you know you want to make something, if you shouldn’t just apprentice yourself to someone and say [for example] just make shoes for ten years. Just get really good at making shoes for the sake of learning what it means to know your materials. And then once you know how to learn a set of skills you can apply that to anything, you can go out and learn how to make anything out of any material. (personal communication, February 7, 2007)

Students enrolling in a school or program to study art expect and deserve to learn some lessons that will prepare them to make images and objects. Both Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago include some concrete formal and technical instruction in their courses. Once they present a few specific skills or formal concepts, however, faculty encourage students to develop their own ideas for using those modes of making. As such, they provide instruction of the kind and structure beginning students expect while they challenge students to think independently.

Plug In.

Holding fast to the centuries-long legacies of analog art forms, some institutions hesitated to embrace the computer as an artmaking medium. For years, schools that offered instruction in arts technologies did so only at advanced levels of instruction. In
other words, students were required to go through a standard analog foundations program before they were permitted to take computer art courses. As I suggested in the introductory paragraph of this dissertation, it was assumed that introductions to fundamental theories and practices of color theory, beginning drawing, 2-D and 3-D art were all any artist needed to make art with electronic and digital media. Today, based on presentations I have seen and conversations I have had with members of Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE), it seems more agree that some introduction to new media, for example, digital imaging, video and sound recording and editing, and Internet communications should be included at the introductory level.

As a result, I was surprised to hear one digital teaching-artist at Carnegie Mellon argue that all undergraduate art students should still be required to take drawing courses. “Drawing is core. If I were building an art department from the ground up, students would take 8 semesters of drawing. I think drawing gets at important skills, critical visual skills” (personal communication, September 13, 2006). He also suggested, however, that computer coding should be taught as a fundamental artmaking skill. He argued, “I don’t want students learning only Adobe’s® way of thinking about computer art. That monocultural software is not a great intro to the potential of computer art” (personal communication, September 13, 2006). To challenge the corporate computer aesthetic of Photoshop®, art educators must explore alternative means for conveying and enabling students to harness the potential of pixels, processors, and power cables.

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s (SAIC, 2006d) comparison of the computer and the pencil seems simultaneously apt and incomplete. Artists are certainly creating work on the computer but they are also conducting research and communicating
with collaborators through digital technologies. Indeed research and communication are skills students in all fields must learn to master. One would be hard-pressed to find an institution that is not invested in developing forms of Internet-based and electronic-pedagogy. Art educators, however, must determine how artists approach and interact with these resources differently than people doing other kinds of work and turn those observations into student learning objectives.

**Future Research**

The field of postsecondary art education is fertile ground for research. More practical and theoretical models for engaging students in postmodern, critical art education at this level would be a significant contribution to the literature of our field. What happens in undergraduate studios affects not only what we see in art galleries and museums but also in our designed environments and the products we consume. In addition, foundations effect what is taught in the name of art in elementary and secondary schools, community centers, and in educational publications (Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007). The following are a few recommendations for those interested in doing work in this area based on questions this dissertation raised in my mind as I was proposing and framing this study, conducting field research, and writing this report.

**History in the Making**

Many times throughout this project, I longed to read more about the history of undergraduate art foundations in the United States. I was curious about the development of what became the fairly standard curriculum as well as the history of introductory courses at individual schools. As suggested in Chapter 1, most authors attribute 2-D, 3-D, and color theory foundations to the Bauhaus preliminary course and beginning
drawing courses to the French Academy. Very little, however, has been written about how, where, and by whom those distinct courses were developed. The Bauhaus influences, for example, were originally all part of the single, six-month preliminary course.

Comprehensive strategic planning should build upon history. As foundations studies move into the 21st century, program coordinators and curriculum planners would benefit from a history of their field. Because such grand narratives are necessarily general, however, faculty and administrators should also understand the history of introductory courses at their own institutions. While I have attempted to trace the development of recent changes to introductory curriculum at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in this dissertation, I was unable to provide complete reports on the curricula in place before those changes. I hope this dissertation will encourage others to compose little, local narratives of their own introductory undergraduate studio art curricula.

Beginners and Masters

I conducted this study to explore specific curricular innovations. Larger questions, however, underscored my initial interest in the topic of undergraduate art foundations. Over the past few decades, the number of undergraduates who major in art has increased. Simultaneously, the Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA) has established itself as the mark of artistic professionalism. While more students are earning MFAs than ever before, many undergraduate art majors end their academic and professional artistic pursuits after they obtain their bachelor’s degrees. This led me to wonder, what is an undergraduate education in studio art for? What is the meaning of the Bachelor of
Fine Arts degree (BFA) if so many professional artists and designers earn a MFA degree? Is the BFA still the equivalent of a professional license?

Of the few extended publications on postsecondary art education I found in my research, few make a distinction between the BFA and MFA degrees. Some vaguely refer to “artist education” while others move back and forth between observations and statements about undergraduate and masters level education. In the future, I think researchers and instructors must make clearer distinctions between teaching and learning at these levels. Educators must ask themselves how much they can expect students to learn over the course of a four year program. More specific to this study, they should ask themselves how much they should expect students to know at the end of their foundations studies. In other words, what are foundations for? In addition, as art students are encouraged to pursue non-media-specific conceptual work grounded in knowledge derived from other disciplines, what will distinguish a BFA and BA degree? At times in my discussions with introductory faculty it seemed they expected students to leave their classes fully developed, some imagined students entering at this stage.

Different people will answer these questions differently. Some will draw on the language of liberal arts education to suggest a general education for undergraduate art students while others will call for more and deep focus on materials and processes particular to visual arts practices. Regardless, all should consider how lessons, assignments, and critiques could be structured to meet the needs of students at specific levels of education.
Impacts of Innovation

The contemporary artists I’m most excited by were trained in institutions that emphasized formalist foundations or were educated outside of schools altogether. Ultimately, each found a way to make his or her practice contemporary and meaningful, building on and challenging what they learned in school and from their mentors. This leads me to wonder what differences curricular reforms reflective of postmodern art practices and critical pedagogy might make.

As a descriptive study, I did not attempt to evaluate or determine the impact or efficacy of the programs I examined. Rather, I was interested in documenting curriculum and instruction at two institutions attempting to rewrite what and how postsecondary level art is taught in the name of foundations. A future study might examine the impact of these postmodern lessons. For example: What has been gained? Lost? For example, do these open-ended foundations programs deny students a tradition to rebel against? Such a study may not be possible for many years. Finding ways to monitor the outcome of introductory curricula, however, should be part of any ongoing process of innovation.

Final Thoughts

In my descriptions of the geographic and institutional contexts in which students study art at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I tried to illustrate how the location and physical and material resources of a program might influence what it can and should attempt to accomplish in the name of art foundations. As one professor at Carnegie Mellon suggested:

Each institution is so very unique in terms of the aquarium of what is possible. So you’re always thinking of how you can maximize your strategic advantages given
your difference. You don’t necessarily try to get what other people have.

(personal communication, October 18, 2006)

Similarly, Stewart (2003) observed, “each art department has its own unique strengths and systems of values” (p. 27).

It would contradict the postmodern celebration of multiplicity to replace one standardized foundations curriculum, inadequate in serving the needs of all art students, with another. Rather, each individual school needs to clarify its overall mission and determine if and how its foundation program can prepare students to meet related objectives. As this kind of institutional diversity expands, administrators will have to work even harder to communicate their missions and objectives to potential students.

The introductory curricula at Carnegie Mellon University and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago I described in this dissertation distinguish themselves by introducing strategies to help students develop ideas for their work. In so doing, faculty and students at these schools must open themselves up to new possibilities for teaching and learning. Relative to traditional foundations objectives, the objectives of these programs may seem imprecise, the outcomes unclear. As a professor at Carnegie Mellon noted, however: “In working in a foundations program, we have to think not about what’s in Art:21 now but what is going to most prepare students who are going to be making work that might not fit into Art:21 at all” (personal communication, October 19, 2006). That’s a tall order that demands a set of brave new basics.
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School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Our history. Retrieved October 5, 2006 from [http://www.saic.edu/about/history/index.html](http://www.saic.edu/about/history/index.html)


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH
June 17, 2006

Patricia Stuhr, Professor and Chair  
Department of Art Education  
The Ohio State University  
258 Hopkins Hall  
128 North Oval Mall  
Columbus, OH 43210

Dear Patricia,

It is with pleasure that we send this letter to support your research of the undergraduate introductory visual art program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago as part of the study “What are Foundations For: Case Studies of Two Innovative Undergraduate Introductory Visual Art Programs.” During your time at our school and in coordination with the First Year Program, you will be given access to observe various introductory classes and to speak with our faculty and students. We will work with you to coordinate these sessions and simply request that our faculty, students and staff be treated with respect.

My colleagues and I believe that your proposed study will be an important contribution to the literature on postsecondary art education. We look forward to investigating the question “What are Foundations For?” with you.

Sincerely,

Jim Elinski  
Director, First Year Program

Cc Bruce Jenkins, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
May 15, 2006

Patricia Stuhr, Professor and Chair
Department of Art Education
The Ohio State University
258 Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH 43210

Dear Patricia,

It is with pleasure that I send this letter to support your research of the undergraduate introductory visual art program at Carnegie Mellon University as part of the study “What are Foundations For: Case Studies of Two Innovative Undergraduate Introductory Visual Art Programs.” During your time at our school, please feel free to observe various introductory classes and to speak with our faculty and students.

Your proposed study will be an important contribution to the literature on postsecondary art education. We look forward to investigating the question “What are Foundations For?” with you.

Respectfully,

John Carson
Head of School
APPENDIX B

SCHEDULES OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS, FACULTY INTERVIEWS,
AND STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days/Times</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 AM – 11:20 AM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Art in Context</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>2D Media Studio I: Drawing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Concept Studio III</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Art in Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 a.m.– 12:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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<td>12:30 – 1:20 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 – 4:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Concept Studio I</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Concept Studio I</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Electronic Media Studio I</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>3D Media Studio I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 – 6:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Visiting Artist Lecture</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Contemporary Issues Forum</strong></td>
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Carnegie Mellon University
Visit #1 Schedule
September 11-14, 2006
## Visit #1 Schedule

### September 19-21, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days/Times</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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<tr>
<td>9 AM – 12 PM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Core Studio Practice</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Core Studio Practice</td>
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<td>1 PM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio I</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Core Studio Practice</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio I Observation</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio I Observation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:30 PM – 7:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio I Observation</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio I</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio II</td>
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<td>Days/ Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 AM – 11:20 AM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Concept Studio III</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> 2D Media Studio I: Drawing</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Concept Studio III</td>
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<td><strong>Observation</strong> Art in Context</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Art in Context</td>
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<td>11:30 AM - 12:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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<td>12:30 PM – 1:20 PM</td>
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<td>1:30 – 4:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Concept Studio I</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Concept Studio I</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Concept Studio III</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Electronic Media Studio I</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 – 6:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Visiting Artist Lecture</strong> Contemporary issues Forum</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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</table>
# Visit #2 Schedule

**The School of the Art Institute of Chicago**

**October 24 - 27, 2006**

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<tr>
<td>9 AM – 12 PM</td>
<td>Faculty Interview</td>
<td>Observation Core Studio Practice</td>
<td>Observation Core Studio Practice</td>
<td>Observation Core Studio Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 PM</td>
<td>Observation Research Studio I</td>
<td>Observation Core Studio Practice</td>
<td>Faculty Interview</td>
<td>Faculty Interview</td>
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<td>Faculty Interview</td>
<td>Faculty Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Observation Research Studio I</td>
<td>Observation Research Studio I</td>
<td>Observation Research Studio II</td>
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<td>Days/Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 – 11:20 AM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Concept Studio II</em></td>
<td><strong>Student Focus Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30 AM – 12:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Interview</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30 – 1:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Student Focus Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 – 4:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Concept Studio II</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 – 6:20 PM</td>
<td><strong>Visiting Artist Lecture</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Contemporary issues Forum</em></td>
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The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Visit #3 Schedule
April 10 –12, 2007

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<tr>
<th>Times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 AM</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Core Studio Practice</td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Core Studio Practice</td>
<td>Faculty Interview</td>
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<td>1 PM</td>
<td><strong>Student Focus Group</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio II</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Student Focus Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td><em>Exhibition Review</em> ARTBASH - First Year Program end-of-the-year show</td>
<td>Faculty Interview <strong>Observation</strong> Research Studio II</td>
<td>Observation Research Studio II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Focus Group</td>
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APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT DOCUMENTS
FACULTY RECRUITMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This letter was sent to potential participants via email.

Date

Dear ____________: 

I am a doctoral student in Art Education at The Ohio State University. For my dissertation, I am conducting descriptive case studies of two innovative introductory visual art, or foundations, programs. The title of the study is Brave New Basics: Case Portraits of Innovation in Introductory Undergraduate Introductory Studio Art Curriculum. For now, I understand and define such programs as different from the formally-focused, Bauhaus-attributed sequence of drawing, 2 and 3-D design, and color theory implemented in most programs. Descriptions of such programs are in high demand by Foundation program coordinators and faculty across the country. Carnegie Mellon University/The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the programs I am studying and you were recommended as a potential participant.

If you agree to participate in this project:
• I will review a copy of your introductory level course syllabus;
• I will visit your class to conduct observations 2-3 times during the semester Fall 2006 (Note: I will not be evaluating you or your students. I will simply be observing and later describing the instructional and assessment strategies you employ.);
• We will schedule a mutually agreeable time for an interview of no more than 90 minutes regarding your philosophy and practices regarding introductory level art education. At that meeting, I hope you will share examples of your students work.;
• You will be asked to introduce the study to your introductory students and ask if any are interested in participating in a focus group on the topic;

If you choose to participate, you will select a pseudonym I will use in my reports to protect your identity. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without prejudice.

I look forward to investigating the innovative undergraduate foundations with you, your colleagues, and your students. Please contact me at kushins.1@osu.edu if you have any questions regarding this letter or the framework and goals my research.

Sincerely,
Jodi Kushins
STUDENT RECRUITMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This flyer was emailed to faculty to be shared with students.

WHAT ARE YOUR ARTISTIC GOALS?

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU NEED TO LEARN TO REACH THESE GOALS?

Have you ever thought about questions like these?
Would you like to share your thoughts & hear what other students are thinking about these issues?

Contact Jodi Kushins at kushins.1@osu.edu to find out more about participating in an exciting discussion about contemporary art and undergraduate art education.