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Taking Cues from Online Learning Offline in the Visual Classroom

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Taking Cues from Online Learning Offline in the Visual Classroom

Tucked away on the third floor of the old portion of the student union, the University of Iowa Museum of Art (UIMA) welcomes visitors. The UIMA faces similar challenges to those other academic museums encounter: how to get students in the door and how to make the experience meaningful. However, the UIMA has an additional obstacle. After a flood in 2008 rendered the museum's recently remodeled building uninhabitable, staff had to find creative ways to continue to participate in the campus community without a permanent structure. Born out of this tragedy, the Visual Classroom (VC) became the museum's new temporary home on campus. It serves as a place of learning and research for students and the public. Curators often coordinate exhibitions in the VC with themed semesters and symposia on campus. Additionally, print drawer units and vitrines holding a range of works on paper, small objects, and textiles related to specific courses frequently occupy the study area. Many models for designing engaging, interactive experiences for students in museums exist. Online programs have become important tools for creating student-centered approaches. They also offer an example for offline interactions in museums. Theories of online learning can inform how museums provide a student-centered approach while achieving the instructor's desired learning objectives during university class visits.

The best online and in-person delivery methods have similar goals: facilitate open-ended discussions, student discovery of the material/student ownership of the material, and collaboration.¹ Technology encourages these goals, but it is not the emphasis in itself.² Recent research on the effectiveness of online teaching methods has stressed the benefit of customized material for and by students. It also explores the ramifications of the self-paced, informal, and unstructured environment.³ A

¹ William B. Crow and Herminia Din identify three educational benefits of online learning: "(1) access, outreach, and extended educational encounters; (2) the ability to inquire, document, archive; (3) online learning reflects how visitors communicate." Similarly, Matthew MacArthur recognizes general principles of museum learning that a museum's online presence can enhance: visitors approach museums as a wealth of information from which they can select significant aspects; exhibitions spark interactions among visitors and foster meaning-making; information online highlights the levels of meaning and different interpretations; visitors benefit from investigating objects themselves; interactions among visitors of different ages and knowledge levels help everyone learn; and connections are key – among visitors, among objects, between museum and the outside world. William B. Crow and Herminia Din, "The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums," *Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 163. Matthew MacArthur, "Can Museums Allow Online Users to Become Participants?" in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, eds. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 61-62.

² Crow and Din, 171.

³ Placing visitors in control of their experience and encouraging them to pursue their interests in the museum are similar to the components of the andragogic model of adult learning, which is

traditional view of the museum as a space with artworks selected and organized by curators has not yet been eclipsed by a technologically savvy museum where the audience is in complete control of its experience. However, academic museums and others are moving toward a model in which visitors can control many facets of their visit with their smartphones or touchscreens in exhibitions. Technology has four main advantages for teaching in the museum: it is open-ended, self-paced, collaborative, and empowering. These advantages can be integrated into a class visit to the VC even with limited access to technology. In what follows, I will explain the function of the VC, how the museum approached class visits prior to the flood, and how to apply the lesson from online learning to the VC.

The VC is a teaching gallery and classroom space in a former ballroom in the student union. It includes exhibition space for approximately 500 objects (many of which are small- to medium-sized sculptures displayed in glass cases, works on paper, and some paintings), preparatory workspace, and storage for works on paper. Funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, its purpose is to teach, hence its moniker “Visual Classroom” rather than “gallery.” It consists of a central exhibition space with two wings forming a T-shape. When it was built in 2009, both wings functioned primarily as exhibition spaces. A separate print study room accessible from the main space allowed classes to see works not currently on view. In 2013, the print study area moved from the separate room to one of the wings. This shift provided more room for classes to view works and integrated the private class visits into the rest of the exhibition space. The new configuration allows a class to seamlessly move from discussing works on view to those brought out for the class.

The UIMA began tracking tours and visits in 2002 with data for university class visits available from 2006-7. The majority of classes that schedule a visit to the VC are art history or studio art courses, but courses from other programs, such as Spanish, First-Year Seminars, and English, have come to the VC too. It is these classes in particular that reveal the potential and importance of the VC. For example, when a writing professor brought her undergraduate personal writing course to the space, students examined not only how artists represented themselves in self-portraits and why they may have done so, but students also made connections to the autobiographical readings that they had done in the course and

intrinsically motivated and driven by the needs and interests of the learner. Malcolm S. Knowles, a leading theorist of the model, points out that andragogy allows for flexibility. College students are not the same as adult learners, but the similarity between the findings of successful university online learning modules and adult learners suggests the model could serve as an example for best practices in teaching in general rather than applying only to adult learners. Malcolm S. Knowles, “Introduction: The Art and Science of Helping Adults Learn,” in *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning*, Malcolm S. Knowles and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), 14-18.

reflected on their own writing.⁴ The visit helped them to think about self-representation in more general terms,⁵ not linked to a specific discipline or medium.⁶

Classes convene in the print study area, which has tables and pull-out easels mounted to one wall. University class visits have always combined close looking with discussion. Before the flood in 2008, the number of class visits to the museum was a fraction of those that came to the VC in the 2015-2016 academic year. For example in 2006-2007, twenty university classes scheduled private visits to the museum, and in 2007-2008 sixteen classes did. In contrast, 2014-2015 had approximately forty class visits, and in 2015-2016 the number exceeded seventy.⁷ Once an instructor requests a visit, the curator selects fifteen to twenty works not on view to show the class.⁸ Curators take the instructor's goals for the visit into account when choosing works, and they address the students' needs during the visit itself. When showing works to a printmaking class, the curator may ask about the students' current projects, their goals for the visit, and connections between the works shown and their practice. The balance between the instructor's objectives and students' interests creates unique experiences for each class. By dedicating curators instead of graduate students or docents to teach classes in the study space, the UIMA has the ability to curate multiple mini-exhibitions each semester tailored to the specific requests of students and instructors rather than

⁴ The connection between artwork and writing shares much with G. Stanley Hall's association with art and history. The greatest goal in history, he said, has a moral component: the elucidation of the "virtues" of the fallen and their motivations. The benefit of art is "its most idealizing work is in gilding the gray acts of history with a little touch of that 'light that never was on sea or land' by showing how great men felt and thought, by revealing the higher motives and thoughts of the future so that the students of history will themselves be infected with these ideals and will themselves do good when opportunity offers." G. Stanley Hall, "Museums of Art and Teachers of History," in *Art Museums and Schools: Four Lectures Delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Stockton Axson, Kenyon Cox, G. Stanley Hall, and Oliver S. Tonks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 91-92.

⁵ The instructor taught the course again in Fall 2017 and brought her students to the VC. She noted that students referred to works and ideas from their visit throughout the semester. Personal correspondence with the author, December 16, 2017.

⁶ The transferability of skills and knowledge to other disciplines is a key feature of self-directed learning in college students. Georgine Loaker, "Self-Directed Undergraduate Study," in *Andragogy in Action*, 102-103.

⁷ The number of class visits is an approximation based on the UIMA's Annual Reports (2012-2013 to 2014-2015) and internal documentation of classroom visits for the years prior to 2012. The numbers ebb and flow in part due to staff availability and campus events. Annual Report, University of Iowa Museum of Art, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://uima.uiowa.edu/about/annual-report/>.

⁸ Prior to Fall 2015, a graduate assistant led university class visits in the VC. Before the flood, the education curator had a greater role in leading university classes. As the nature of K-12 visits changed after the flood, he devoted more time to those visits.

relying on the semester-long installations in the VC to meet the needs of a student body consisting of over 24,000 undergraduate and 5,600 graduate students.⁹

The essential aspects of the class visit are seeing works in person, examining them in detail, and discussing them. Most classes that come to the VC have fifty minutes for the visit. While art historians and curators know that this is not much time to look at one object, let alone twenty, it can initially feel like an eternity to students unaccustomed to visiting museums. The study area provides an opportunity for them to learn how to look at art, battle with their own impatience and/or boredom, and recognize, perhaps for the first time, the differences between the appearance of woodcuts, engravings, aquatints, silkscreens, and drawings. The skills they learn and refine in the fifty minutes of class have the potential to serve as a gateway to seeing once they leave the VC. As Maxine Greene notes:

We have to make discovery possible again, and exploration, and the idea of standard. We have to launch ourselves and those other who are free to go on new adventures in sense-making. And, yes, we have to set many others free again, and one way to think of understanding freedom, you recall, is to think of it as the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise. The arts nurture that capacity, as the arts awaken to the process of living itself.¹⁰

The study area in the VC gives students the tools and confidence to trust their eyes, knowledge, and instincts. Given time to study the works, they are surprised by the details that they had not noticed at first glance. By arming them not only with tactics for looking but also the self-assurance to approach art, they can take these skills with them into other areas of their education and life.

While discussion has been a mainstay in university class visits since at least 2002 when the current education curator began at the museum, I sought to find a theoretical and practical basis for how to incite more discussion in the VC. In order to activate the art works and encourage students to contribute their ideas, I have drawn on the best practices of online teaching tools when designing the structure of class visits. Art historians have been grappling with how to incorporate technology into their courses thoughtfully and effectively since the mid-1990s.¹¹ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, for example, developed the ECIT program using the database Oracle so her students could discover information for themselves. Used in

⁹ Based on Fall 2016 enrollment. University of Iowa Student Profile, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://admissions.uiowa.edu/future-students/university-iowa-student-profile>.

¹⁰ Maxine Greene, "Being Fully Present to Works of Art (1982)," in *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 63.

¹¹ For a review of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in art history, including but not limited to the use of technology, see Marie Gasper-Hulvat, "Active Learning in Art History: A Review of Formal Literature," *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 2, no. 1, (2017), <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol2/iss1/2>.

this way, technology gives students agency in their learning and the opportunity to examine aspects that they find fascinating in more depth.¹² More recently, Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia La Follette, and Andrea Pappas edited *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, which demonstrates how art history instructors integrate technology into their courses.¹³ For instance, Donahue-Wallace developed detective games for students in which they pretend to be research assistants for an imaginary art historian to transform her online survey course into an active learning environment.¹⁴ Similarly, Eva R. Hoffman and Christine Cavalier used digital cognitive maps called VUE that instructors and students can design to build student-driven experiences into their course.¹⁵

Not only have art historians experimented with the possibilities online learning offers, but also museums have explored online programs. William B. Crow and Herminia Din have helped create online workshops for museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and they have written extensively about opportunities for museums in online learning and engagement.¹⁶ While technology increases visitors' access to materials, such as historical photographs and X-rays from conservation efforts, Crow and Din emphasize the focus should remain on the interaction between people and artworks without technology overshadowing these encounters.¹⁷ In an examination of online learning programs at The Met, The Field Museum of Chicago, The Philips Collection, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, and the American Museum of Natural History, Din found that online modules offered learners the possibility of interacting with museum staff, each other, and the museums' collections and resources in a way that "create[d] a unique sense of ownership of the museum."¹⁸ While the Internet allows learners to connect to a diverse community, it is not the only space for this kind of

¹² Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Digital Culture and the Practices of Art and Art History: Making Computers Work for the History of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (June 1997): 198-201.

¹³ Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia La Follette, and Andrea Pappas, eds., *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

¹⁴ Kelly Donahue-Wallace, "A Tale of Two Courses: Instructor-Driven and Student-Centered Approaches to Online Art History Instruction," in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies*, 109-118.

¹⁵ Eva R. Hoffman and Christine Cavalier, "ARTIFACT: Mapping a Global Survey of the History of Art," in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies*, 79-96.

¹⁶ See William B. Crow and Herminia Din, *All Together Now: Museums and Online Collaborative Learning* (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2011); William B. Crow and Herminia Din, *Unbound by Place or Time: Museums and Online Learning* (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2009); and Crow and Din, "The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums," 161-172.

¹⁷ Crow and Din, "The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums," 163, 170-171. For the pros and cons of online learning, see also Herminia Din, "Pedagogy and Practice in Museum Online Learning," *Journal of Museum Education* 40, no. 2 (July 2015): 103-105.

¹⁸ Din, 108.

collaborative learning to take place. University museums are ideal places to share ideas. The VC aims to ignite learning and a sense of ownership of the museum in students in line with the mission of the museum: “to advance education and research.”¹⁹ To accomplish these goals, I have borrowed key characteristics from online teaching methods to encourage class visits that are open-ended, self-paced, collaborative, and empowering.

Barbara Maria Stafford describes the Internet’s open-ended quality as both “interlace and labyrinth.”²⁰ A simple search on Google leads students to hundreds of sites that can enrich their knowledge through a variety of avenues. The unrestricted space to explore a topic allows students to discover how different peoples and eras have responded to similar questions. They are not bound to what the instructor presents to them. Rather, they are free to ask new questions and find their own answers. A gallery tour or class visit can have a similarly open-ended structure if the curator uses questions to guide the discussion rather than controlling it. The ensuing dialogue can be imagined as a diamond shape.²¹ Ideally, students’ questions will determine the direction of the class, creating an open and free-flowing experience, but if students are hesitant to pose a question, the curator can initiate the conversation. After a student poses a question, classmates, the instructor, and curator discuss possible answers based on the details of the work(s) before them, the background knowledge of the students, and their shared histories. As they talk, assumptions and understanding are explored, tested, and stretched.

The dialogue format can be used for any audience, as Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee point out; however, I have found that it works best for upper classmen and graduate students who have taken studio art and art history courses in the past, or in courses in which discussion makes up a large part of the day-to-day class environment. Students who have not had these experiences often lack the courage to speak up about these topics in the VC, even though those who do participate offer insightful comments and questions about the works.²² When

¹⁹ The UIMA’s mission is outlined in its Strategic Plan, 2015-2020 and also on its website. “About,” University of Iowa Museum of Art, <https://uima.uiowa.edu/about/>.

²⁰ Barbara Maria Stafford, “www.display: Complicating the Formats of Art History,” in *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in association with Yale University Press, 1999), 55.

²¹ Each point on the diamond represents the role of a participant: mover (propels dialogue forward), follower (listens and offers observations that back up the dialogue), bystander (takes in all points of view and weighs them equally), and opposer (provides a different opinion). Participants change roles as the dialogue unfolds. In addition to dialogue, Burnham and Kai-Kee describe characteristics of conversation and discussion in a museum guided tour/gallery talk setting. See Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee, “Conversation, Discussion, and Dialogue,” in *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 79-93.

²² Burnham and Kai-Kee do not acknowledge this obstacle in *Teaching in the Art Museum*, in which they discuss their experiences at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Barnes Foundation.

leading a class visit for a graduate-level studio silkscreen class in the fall of 2015, for example, I encouraged the students to look closely as they made their way through the prints and to inquire about processes and subject matter. Because they had the technical expertise and some knowledge of art history, they were primed to dive in. Students had time to explore the works before I shared any information about them, such as circumstances of production and subject matter. They spent class time scrutinizing the prints under magnifying glasses and creating their own paths through the space.²³ When I noticed someone standing in front of a print for a few minutes, I asked them questions and offered to share information. Frequently, students formed small groups around prints whose techniques were difficult to discern, and they hypothesized how artists had made them. The studio instructor and I chimed in with our opinions and knowledge of the artists' practices, but the students led the process of discovery. At the end of the class, some prints had hardly been looked at, but the ones that had been studied had sparked curiosity, admiration, and, sometimes, envy in the students.

The open-ended nature of dialogue lends itself to the second advantage of technology: it is self-paced. In the example above, students decided how long to stay with an artwork.²⁴ When seeing an object in person, it appeals to our senses. Not only can we see it, but in some instances, we can smell, hear, or (less frequently in a museum) touch it. Engaging more of the senses spurs new ideas about art works and their history.²⁵ Students participate in "critical perception," which has the

Their examples of gallery tour participants include those who have the desire and opportunity to go to museums frequently and attend museum-sponsored events. At a public university in the Midwest, many students have not had these opportunities. Therefore, I find Sybille Ebert-Schifferer's assessment of the challenges art historians, curators, and museum educators face to be more accurate: "...most people come to a museum unprepared – without knowing period dates, biblical and mythological subjects, and so on. To fill in the gaps in their knowledge is a nearly impossible challenge for the museum staff assigned to conduct a guided tour." Pat Villeneuve and Mary Erickson reached a similar conclusion about visitors: "Free-choice visitors are not presumed to bring any particular expertise to the museum but are viewed as capable, curious, and ready to learn." Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, "Art History and Its Audience: A Matter of Gaps and Bridges," in *The Two Art Histories*, 46. Pat Villeneuve and Mary Erickson, "Beyond the Constructivist Museum: Guided Interaction through an Exhibition Interface," *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 4, no. 2 (2012), 50.

²³ Regardless of the level of art-historical knowledge that students possess, I always provide at least five minutes at the beginning of class for students to explore the works. This time is essential not only for the students to feel comfortable in the VC, but also for them to prepare to look closely for the next forty-five minutes.

²⁴ Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee, "Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation," in *Teaching in the Art Museum*, 61.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin wrote, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935)," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 220.

advantage of igniting the whole sensory experience and history of the viewer rather than privileging sight and the two-dimensional object.²⁶ It is a delicate balance between nudging students along in their analysis by sharing pertinent information and taking over their process of discovery by overloading them with too much information they will not remember. Granting the students plenty of time to look at the works at their own pace gives them the opportunity to form questions and find their own meanings in the objects.²⁷ The chance to discuss works among themselves enables them to make personal connections to the works and each other.²⁸ The intimate space of the study area in the VC is less cavernous than the open space of the rest of the VC and, therefore, encourages students to share freely.

Like the open-ended and self-paced qualities of online teaching, the last two advantages technology lends teaching in (and out) of the museum – collaborative and empowering – are related. The collaborative components of the visit help empower students to trust their eyes and analysis of art. In an online learning situation, collaboration can take the shape of discussion boards or low-stakes interactive team modules, such as games or ungraded quizzes. In the VC, I create this environment when I allow students to look closely at the objects and invite them to take the lead in the discussion. Students have time to look at the beginning and end of the visit. These informal and unstructured moments give students a chance form opinions and questions. When they have their smartphones with them, as many of the students do, we can combine the best of online learning and seeing the artwork in person. Students can explore the avenues of inquiry that intrigue them on their own and in small groups. They practice connoisseurship skills and examine the materiality of the objects in front of them instead of digital reproductions.

Students' curiosity determines how their understanding of the object will unfold. As the class comes together for a discussion of the objects, the curator has the opportunity to clear up misunderstandings.²⁹ It can also be an opportunity to remind students how to scrutinize online sources.³⁰ Moreover, unlike an online

²⁶ Julia A. Sienkewicz coined the term "critical perception" in "Critical Perception: An Exploration of the Cognitive Gains of Material Culture Pedagogy," *Winterthur Portfolio* 47, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 2013), 117-137.

²⁷ Burnham and Kai-Kee, "Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation," 63.

²⁸ In their analysis of a teen artist residency program that used online learning prior to the start of the on-site portion at North Carolina Museum of Art, Michelle H. Harrell and Emily Kotecki note the importance "for unstructured social interaction that promotes social learning, both online and on-site." Michelle H. Harrell and Emily Kotecki, "The Flipped Museum: Leveraging Technology to Deepen Learning," *Journal of Museum Education* 40, no. 2 (July 2015): 128.

²⁹ Nancy Wu said, "Teaching 'live' remains the most versatile, flexible, and effective way of teaching precisely because of the human intervention." Quoted in Burnham and Kai-Kee, "Conversation, Discussion, and Dialogue," 80.

³⁰ Nancy F. Cason considers the effect of interactive media on the acquisition of knowledge in an art history survey versus the use of slides. With interactive media, students searched more to find

module, a class visit can allow for exploration with instantaneous feedback and guidance. The curator can step in immediately to correct students and redirect them to other avenues of investigation in real time. Students, like other visitors to a museum, need some guidance to understand what they see.³¹

The collaborative discussion in the VC coupled with seeing works in person produce an empowering experience. Greene points out, “[T]he learner has to be there in person – confronting the art form, relying on his/her capacities, in some sense creating his/her meanings, constructing and reconstructing his/her world. We have to empower *individuals* to do this.”³² Standing before the objects while discussing them in an informal and collaborative manner encourages students to ask questions, follow their interests, and make connections between their course content and the objects on view. It puts them in control of the visit, thereby empowering them to take the lead in their investigation of objects. Furthermore, it motivates them to use higher order thinking skills of Bloom’s taxonomy such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating new meaning.³³ Because students apply knowledge they already have from their course or personal experience during the class visit, the VC operates like a flipped classroom in which students apply knowledge they study outside of class to in-class activities. Students in flipped classrooms score higher on fluency and creativity, and they “produce novel ideas that are rich and relevant to real-world problems.”³⁴

Furthermore, students who participated in university class visits responded that viewing works in person was valuable to their understanding of course material. In an anonymous survey about university class visits at the UIMA, ninety- six percent of students found the objects appropriate for their course content, ninety-seven percent deemed the curator valuable to the visit, and ninety percent believed they benefited from object-based discussions during the visit (Table 1). Prior to their class visit, fifty-seven percent of students had never been to the

information, but unfortunately learners using interactive media misunderstood more information than their peers using slides, perhaps because they had so much information at the disposal. Nancy F. Cason, “Interactive Multimedia: An Alternative Context for Studying Works of Art,” *Studies in Art Education* 39, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 336-349.

³¹ Villeneuve and Erickson, 51.

³² Greene, “Being Fully Present to Works of Art (1982),” in *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, 62 (emphasis in original).

³³ For a summary of Bloom’s Taxonomy, see Patricia Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>. For an example of how to apply Bloom’s Taxonomy to art history courses, see Laetitia La Follette, “Bloom’s Taxonomy for Art History. Blending a Skills-Based Approach into the Traditional Introductory Survey,” *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 2, no. 1 (2017), <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol2/iss1/3>.

³⁴ Abdulrahman M. Al-Zahrani, “From Passive to Active: The Impact of the Flipped Classroom through Social Learning Platforms on Higher Education Students’ Creative Thinking,” *British Journal of Educational Technology* 46, no. 6 (2015), 1144.

museum. After the visit, eighty-three percent thought they would return to the museum on their own time (Table 2). The students' written comments indicate that they appreciated the time to look and discuss the works, as well as the curator's feedback: "UIMA does a great job at providing upclose [*sic*] observation and learning. It has allowed me to have a further understanding of our course content and appreciation for the works."³⁵

Since the opening of the VC, the UIMA has tripled the number of university class visits. The VC provides a space for students to question their assumptions and learn how to apply a cross-disciplinary approach to art. It accomplishes the goal that Kenyon Cox discussed in his lecture at the Metropolitan Museum in spring of 1912. Cox imagined children exploring the museum to feed a lifelong interest in art.³⁶ Although he directed his comment toward K-12 students, his sentiment applies to any person entering an art museum for the first time. Telling people to think about an artwork in a particular way does not help them develop an interest in art. However, allowing them time to discover and question objects gives them the opportunity to identify works that are meaningful to them, thereby making it more likely that they will seek out other works on their own in the future. Curators design class visits around the needs to the students in the course. During the class visit, they encourage students to examine works closely at their own pace and make connections to their work and art works assembled.

A key question asked during the visits is "What is most valuable for you to see and discuss today?" Depending on the level of the class (undergraduate introduction or graduate seminar), the answer varies from seeing works by artists discussed in class to questioning the techniques and materials of the piece. I hope during the class visits I achieve Greene's ideals:

³⁵ Comments included:

"Using class time to view prints @ the UIMA was extremely beneficial to my enjoyment of the class and understanding of the material."

"The selection and set up was very helpful to the course and the very reason I signed up for History of Prints. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity and [the curator] was very prepared and knowledgeable! Thank you!"

"It was very fulfilling and great that there was a wide range of art."

Answers collected from University Class Visit Student Evaluations, 2015-16 [symbols and emphasis in the original responses]. The overall response rate was fifty-nine percent (298 students visited; 175 completed the anonymous evaluation). Forty-six students left written feedback. Forty-three of them responded to aspects of the visit; three commented on other facets of the museum. The majority of the comments shared positive experiences about the visit. Two students requested more time to view works; one thought the visit was too long; one wished for more connection to class content; and one would have liked more background information about the artists.

³⁶ "My idea would be to take the horse to water, but not at first to make any ineffectual attempt to compel drinking. Take the children to the museum. Let them range a little. See what they like." Kenyon Cox, "Museums of Art and Teachers of Art," in *Art Museums and Schools*, 55.

...teaching, for me, is fundamentally a matter of discovering what I can do to empower people to move into such imaginary worlds and to achieve them variously as meaningful, to realize them – in their own experience – as aesthetic objects, works of art. I mean enabling them to attend, to notice what is there to be noticed, to let their energies go out to the musical piece, the paintings of the city, the novel, the dance performance in such a fashion that each can emerge in the consciousness of the one attending with increasing clarity and intensity. If that occurs, it is highly likely that dimensions of experience will be illuminated that may not have been noticeable before.³⁷

The VC provides students with a unique chance to sharpen their visual skills and expand their understanding of art, and through this their own experiences. While each institution has its own staffing and programming goals, integrating online learning theories in the VC has helped us take a student-centered approach to teaching and aided the museum in maintaining its position in the campus community during a time of transition.

³⁷ Greene, “The Creative Spirit: Keys, Doors and Possibilities (Address to the New York State Board of Regents, 1984),” in *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, 203-204.

Table 1.
University Class Visit Student Evaluations, 2015-16

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
To what extent were the objects presented appropriate to your course content?	75%	19%	6%	0%
How valuable and/or accommodating was the classroom monitor or museum staff?	83%	14%	3%	0%
If applicable, at what level did you feel you and your classmates benefited from object-based discussion?	53%	37%	10%	<1%*
How knowledgeable, helpful, and effective was the instructor?	77%	19%	3%	0%

Table 2.
Museum Attendance Survey from University Class Visit Student Evaluations, 2015-16

	Yes	No	Maybe
Had you been to the University of Iowa Museum of Art prior to this class visit?	43%	57%	
Do you think you will return to the University of Iowa Museum of Art outside of class?	83%	15%	<1%*

298 students visited; 175 completed the anonymous evaluation with a response rate of 59%. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number; therefore totals may not equal 100%.

*1 student out of 175 respondents.

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