



---

Volume 1  
Issue 1 *What's the problem with the  
introductory art history survey?*

---

2016

## Editor's Introduction: Advancing SoTL-AH

Virginia B. Spivey PhD

Renee McGarry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp>



Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#),  
and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Spivey, Virginia B. PhD and Renee McGarry. 2016. "Editor's Introduction: Advancing SoTL-AH." *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 1, (1). <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol1/iss1/1>

Art History Pedagogy and Practice is published biannually by Art History Teaching Resources (AHTR) in partnership with the Office of Library Services of the City University of New York and the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. For more information, please contact [info@arthistorypp.org](mailto:info@arthistorypp.org).

## Editor's Introduction: Advancing SoTL-AH

Virginia B. Spivey, PhD and Renee McGarry

It is with great enthusiasm that we present the inaugural issue of *Art History Pedagogy and Practice (AHPP)*. Over the past two years, this important undertaking has found widespread support and brought together diverse communities of art history, museum education, digital humanities, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) who believe that teaching is integral to scholarly practice and that pedagogical inquiry can enrich the study of art history and other disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

A 2015 survey, conducted by AHTR (ArtHistoryTeachingResources.org) and funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, confirmed perceptions that, although teaching constitutes a major responsibility and ranks as a significant concern among academic art historians, scant research has been done to interrogate the discipline's pedagogical systems or instructional practices.<sup>2</sup> While *AHPP* emerges from the need to fill that gap, another of the survey's findings--that art historians lack experience and support to perform rigorous practitioner-based pedagogical inquiry--highlights the journal's parallel function as a site for the articulation of new research questions, experimentation with multiple methods of inquiry, and scholarly debate necessary for robust scholarship of teaching and learning in art history. As a peer-reviewed journal, *AHPP* developed as a natural outgrowth of the *AHTR Weekly*, a lively blog series where practitioners write about their teaching ideas and experiences.<sup>3</sup> Together, they offer a digital model of publication where informal and formal SoTL exchange can complement one another and foster public-facing discourse about education in the humanities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The project's rapid momentum speaks both to the need for a journal of SoTL-AH and to the successful collaboration of an expansive network of partners, advisors, and contributors that have made both ArtHistoryTeachingResources.org and *AHPP* a reality. The move to establish the journal developed from a confluence of discussions at AHTR about the site's growth and Andrea Pappas's 2015 CAA presentation "SoTL: What difference does it make?" where she called for a refereed journal of SoTL in art history. Pappas, who now sits on *AHPP*'s Advisory Board, delivered the paper as part of a session entitled "Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach: Developing a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning of Art History." The session was sponsored by CAA's Education Committee and co-chaired by Leda Cempellin and Julia Sienkewicz--both contributors to this present issue along with two other session participants, Beth Harris and Steven Zucker.

<sup>2</sup> See Virginia B. Spivey, Parme Giuntini, Renee McGarry, Michelle Millar Fisher, Karen Shelby, and Kathleen Wentrack, "White Paper on the Need for a Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in AHTR, Nov. 1, 2015; <http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/AHTR-White-Paper-2.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> AHTR was founded in 2013 as an open access, peer-populated repository for lesson plans, videos, and other resources. The AHTR Weekly is published each Friday of the academic year, features instructors from higher education, museums, and K-12 settings, and includes discussions about activities and assignments, innovative instructional approaches, and reflection on classroom experiences.

By exploring questions related to the introductory art history survey, *AHPP*'s first issue aims to advance a long-running conversation in the discipline. In asking "What's the problem with the introductory art history survey?" the title references Randy Bass's landmark article "The Scholarship of Teaching: What the Problem?" in which he establishes that it is the "problems" we encounter in the classroom that are "worth pursuing as an ongoing intellectual focus."<sup>4</sup> The last substantial treatment of this topic appeared in a 1995 special issue of *Art Journal* devoted specifically to pedagogy.<sup>5</sup> Consisting mostly of reports by faculty describing different approaches to teaching the survey, the publication demonstrates the anecdotal, reflective, historiographic treatment that has characterized much literature on teaching and learning in art history. Returning to this theme 21 years later shows a dramatically different landscape for higher education and art history. Innovations in digital technology have particularly affected instruction by improving access to high quality images and resources that support students and faculty. Discourse has also evolved around the need to broaden art historical content and expose implicit bias upheld by traditional survey courses. Research is needed, however, to examine the impact of technology-enhanced instruction, alternative survey models, and critical pedagogies when applied in the classroom.

This additional perspective, which complements theoretical positions, requires closer scrutiny, not only comparing revisions in course curriculum and content, but also looking for evidence of learning in our students' experiences. Individuals new to the scholarship of teaching and learning must know that practitioner-based inquiry embraces multiple research methodologies, often combining quantitative and qualitative data for analysis.<sup>6</sup> As scholars in the humanities, art historians are skilled at addressing the ambiguities and inherent contradictions of the subjects we pursue, and we recognize the intellectual rigor and scholarly value in qualitative data. While surveys and graded assessments may offer insight into student performance, qualitative research methods are well suited to acknowledge the complexities of teaching and learning. These may be used effectively to present more nuanced understanding of students' behaviors, skills, and knowledges, an awareness that seems especially relevant at a time when higher education must better address issues of diversity in the classroom.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Randy Bass, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: What's the Problem, *Inventio*, 1.1, February 1999: 2

<sup>5</sup> The publication was intended as the first in a plan to regularly produce special issues on pedagogy; but, although subsequent issues include brief articles and roundtable discussions on teaching, nothing of similar scale has yet been produced. See Bradford Collins, "Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey: A Practical, Somewhat Theoretical, and Inspirational Guide." *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (October 1, 1995): 23.

<sup>6</sup> See Gary Poole, "Square one: What is research?" In K. McKinney (Ed.) *The scholarship of teaching and learning in and across the disciplines*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> See Stephen Bloch-Schulman and Sherry Linkon, eds., Arts and Humanities in SoTL: A Return to the Big Tent (Special Section) in *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 4.1 (June, 2016) <http://tlijournal.com/tli/index.php/TLI/issue/view/2/showToc>.

The articles published in *AHPP*'s inaugural issue explore different models of inquiry appropriate to SoTL in art history. They include case studies and qualitative data in the form of student comments, personal reflections, and observations in the classroom, and also address quantifiable measurements around learning outcomes, graded performance, and other methods used in education and the learning sciences. Most importantly they ask questions that are important to developing the conceptual frameworks that help shape understanding of pedagogical practice in art history.<sup>8</sup>

This contribution is clear in “Looking Beyond the Canon: Localized and Globalized Perspectives in Art History Pedagogy.” Initially curated by Aditi Chandra and Leda Cempellin for a CAA panel session, this collaboratively-authored article highlights the scope of concerns inherent to the global survey. Based on experience teaching in the U.S. and abroad, the authors present individual case studies that call attention to particulars of the local contexts where teaching and learning takes place while addressing common issues such as the mythology of shared cultural heritage, the distance separating students from the historical past, the residual influence of political and ideological pressures on institutional instruction, and the need to rethink our goals for the introductory survey course. Together, the collection reveals underlying assumptions in art history's pedagogy that must be addressed if the discipline is to embrace the multiple narratives, traditions, and potential impact of a truly global art history.

In “De-Centering ‘The’ Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History,” Melissa Kerin and Andrea Lepage reject the premise of a singular art history survey in today's global context. In contrast, they describe a multi-survey model of introductory courses used at Washington and Lee University that present western art and the art forms of regions often underrepresented, and examine its goals and effectiveness across peer institutions that have adopted a similar approach. Kerin and Lepage's study is significant for its critical evaluation of a specific introductory art history curriculum that has not been addressed in the existing literature.

In an invited contribution to this issue, Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, founders of Smarthistory.org and AHTR advisors, address the important role of technology in “Making the Absent Present: The Imperative of Teaching Art History.” Many critiques of the introductory art history course point to continued reliance on standard survey textbooks as complicit in the problem. Harris and Zucker see digital publication as a solution that allows object-based learning to reach a broader audience at no cost. Smarthistory, which is primarily used by undergraduate

---

<sup>8</sup> Pat Hutchings describes a taxonomy of SoTL questions that may prove useful as art historians move forward in this research. Although Hutchings acknowledges such inquiry can address multiple concerns, she offers four categories characterizing common approaches to SoTL. These include projects that ask “what works?” and focus on the effectiveness of specific methods; “what is?” and describe the essential features of an approach or outcome; studies exploring “visions of the possible” and consider opportunities for learning; and those that serve as “theory-building” and raise issues that may be broadly applied. See Pat Hutchings, “Introduction,” *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. (Stanford: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000), 4-5.

art history instructors and students, provides a conversational and experiential approach in an effort to engage students in ways that art history textbooks have not yet been able. Here, they detail the founding principles of the site and provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence that Smarthistory has positively impacted the art history classroom.

In “Against the ‘Coverage’ Mentality: Rethinking Learning Outcomes and the Core Curriculum,” Julia Sienkewicz asks what is foundational knowledge in art history--an essential question at the heart of several contributions throughout this issue. Sienkewicz argues that instruction aimed at broad coverage of art’s history is inadequate for deep learning of the discipline’s core content and practice. Looking to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning, she proposes art historians articulate learning outcomes for introductory courses that would guide students toward more advanced ways to understand and apply art historical study.

In “Building a Foundation for Survey: Employing a Focused Introduction,” Glenda Swann outlines a strategy she developed--a focused introduction--to improve students’ understanding of disciplinary practice, with the hopes of improving overall engagement in the course. Swann details her methods, discusses a variety of teaching strategies, and comments about changes in observable student behavior in the course. She ends by presenting preliminary data from courses which employed a focused introduction and those that did not, and explores future avenues this study might take. Swann’s study marries the anecdotal and qualitative data with the possibilities of expanding into quantitative data, demonstrating the value of all three when discussing teaching and learning.

We thank the authors for their contributions, which we believe raise new questions and will serve as a platform for the next phase of research in this nascent field. The high response rate to *AHPP*’s initial Call for Paper bodes well for the future of SoTL-AH and underscores not only need for this journal, but also the breadth of interest in its work. As excitement continues to grow both in and beyond the art history community, we look forward to sharing new voices and perspectives that will allow SoTL-AH to flourish.

## Bibliography

- Bass, Randy. "The scholarship of teaching: What's the problem." *Inventio: Creative thinking about learning and teaching* 1, no. 1 (1999): 1-10.
- Bloch-Schulman, Stephen and Sherry Linkon, eds. Arts and Humanities in SoTL: A Return to the Big Tent (Special Section) in *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 4.1 (June, 2016) <http://tlijournal.com/tli/index.php/TLI/issue/view/2/showToc>.
- Collins, Bradford, ed. *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (October 1, 1995)
- Hutchings, Pat, ed. *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Stanford: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000.
- Pappas, Andrea. "SoTL: What difference does it make?" (paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the College Art Association, New York, New York, February 11, 2015).
- Poole, Gary. "Square one: What is research?" in K. McKinney (Ed.) *The scholarship of teaching and learning in and across the disciplines*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- Spivey, Virginia B., Parme Giuntini, Renee McGarry, Michelle Millar Fisher, Karen Shelby, and Kathleen Wentrack, "White Paper on the Need for a Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in AHTR, Nov. 1, 2015; <http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/AHTR-White-Paper-2.pdf>.