

## PART I

### A. COURSE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

---

#### History

This second Inquiry Portfolio will focus on my drawing unit- one of the four components in the Visual Literacy curriculum. (These units are Perceptual Drawing, Speculative Drawing, Color and Composition & Analysis. They make up the studio component of UNL's interdisciplinary drawing and design foundation program.) While taken by students in differing sequences, each unit can serve as an introduction to studio art and design which will be built upon by the other units. The units are designed to complement one another and to reinforce basic skills and awareness of issues in art and design. Although the Visual Literacy program has been in place since fall 1998, the current units have only been taught in this form since fall 2001. Below is a brief description of my course philosophy, methods, and objectives followed by the proposed changes for this year.

#### Philosophy

Teaching a beginning level perceptual drawing course gives me the opportunity to teach much more than just draughtsmanship. It provides a forum for introducing new ways of seeing, thinking and expressing that are essential in the development of an artist or designer.

Since true drawing from observation is more reliant on seeing and perception than on manual dexterity with tools, I begin by helping my students to use their eyes in a new way. In her influential book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, Betty Edwards describes the "right brain shift" as a tool for learning to perceive a subject for drawing. When a student of drawing employs the right brain rather than the left, he or she moves away from naming and analysis into the non-verbal and the intuitive realm.<sup>1</sup> In other words, when students stop drawing what they think they know they start drawing what they really see.

This different way of using the eyes is not only essential in perceptual drawing, it is useful in gaining a more complete awareness of the visual world. The process of perceptual drawing teaches one to observe, distinguish and relate<sup>2</sup>- skills that can be expanded beyond the studio. This right-brained way of seeing coupled with a left-brain analysis of form and meaning lead to "Visual Literacy."

#### Methods

The title of our program, "Visual Literacy," suggests that we teach students to "read what they see." However, I believe that a real fluency in this area includes verbal articulation and critical thinking- skills complimentary to the visual components of our course. These skills converge in my classroom during critiques and discussions of both student projects and historical and contemporary visual artifacts where students incorporate new art and design terms into their vocabulary. Active participation is required in my courses because I believe that each student brings unique experiences and perspectives that, when shared, can be useful and even inspiring to others. Skills in description, interpretation and evaluation<sup>3</sup> are developed, tested and honed in a supportive atmosphere.

Skills in drawing from observation are cultivated in a series of exercises that focus on the perception of edges, spaces, relationships, light and shadow which, when integrated, lead to perception of "the whole." These perceptions are what Betty Edwards identifies as the basic skills of drawing.<sup>4</sup> These exercises, while focused on the eyes, also allow students to experiment with a variety of media and to learn the value of patience and persistence.

Throughout the unit students are required to keep a sketchbook. I encourage students to take visual notes during slide lectures in their sketchbooks to help them process and retain the images and

---

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Betty. *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. (Penguin, 1979, 1989, 1999) 28-46

<sup>2</sup> Betti, Claudia and Teel Sale. *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach*. (Harcourt Brace, 1997) 30.

<sup>3</sup> This tripartite critique method comes from Terry Barrett's book *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary*, (Mayfield, 1994)

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, XVIII

information. Visual note taking as well as drawing from observation outside of class can accelerate a student's progress in drawing. Certain drawing assignments incorporate a sketchbook component, but students are free to put anything into it whether it relates to class or not. Students who seize this opportunity to weave their sketchbook into other aspects of their life are likely to maintain a sketchbook long after my course is over.

Finally, I want to teach students to value the process as well as the products in their drawing explorations. Especially in the beginning, the product is secondary to, or simply a by-product of, an active but sometimes elusive process. In the end, if they understand the process, they will always be able to make more drawings. While a portfolio is important, it is the process of seeing and application of visual literacy that will be called upon in all of a student's later pursuits in art and design.

### **Objectives**

1. To develop and utilize a design/drawing vocabulary
2. To understand the difference between the modes of naming and seeing
3. To develop strategies for evaluating your work and the work of others
4. To investigate work by artists and designers
5. To develop and implement compositional strategies for design and drawing
6. To utilize a viewfinder as a compositional aid
7. To competently represent 3D objects and spaces on paper from observation
8. To develop a disciplined and reflective drawing and writing practice
9. To learn and apply a variety of techniques for seeing and drawing
10. To explore a variety of drawing materials

### **B. CURRICULAR CHANGES**

---

As a result of changes in other Visual Literacy units as well as an interest in expanding my students' visual literacy beyond the studio, I made curricular and structural changes to my Perceptual Drawing unit.

1. The one-time Artist and Designer Report became 6 weekly "Outside Research" assignments that relate to the weekly drawing exercises. (See Outside Research handout) On each due date, students first discuss their research with a nearby student. We then discuss several of their images as a class.
2. I changed the format of the course from three formal classes per week to two formal classes and one informal class per week. The formal days (Mondays and Wednesdays) are packed with Outside Research Reports, critiques and introductions and practice with new drawing exercises. The informal days (Fridays) are used for conducting Outside Research, regular drawing homework or revision of drawings for portfolio submission. Attendance is taken on Mondays and Wednesdays but not on Fridays. My Graduate Teaching Assistant and I are "on call" for questions or help on Fridays.
3. The studio projects now focus exclusively on drawing. The three-dimensional assignments in wire and museum board were dropped. (The Speculative Drawing unit increased the number of three-dimensional projects at the same time that I eliminated them from my unit so students still get about the same amount of experience working in 3D.)

The Outside Research assignment corresponds directly with Objective #4 (To investigate work by artists and designers,) but the associated discussion should also support Objective #1 (To develop and utilize a design/drawing vocabulary.) For more information on how these changes fit into the evolution of my course, please feel free to review my Peer Review of Teaching Benchmark Portfolio from 2001 and my first Inquiry Portfolio from 2003.

## PART II

### A. HYPOTHESIS (FOR EACH CHANGE TO THIS YEAR'S CURRICULUM)

---

**Central Question:** Will the conversion of some studio projects to Outside Research significantly benefit my students' learning?

**Sub-questions:** Will students develop a habit of conducting Outside Research after my course?  
Will students value Outside Research as supplement to the textbook?  
Will the Outside Research teach students to look differently at their surroundings as they become more visually literate?

#### **Adding weekly "Outside Research" assignments**

My hopes for the Outside Research assignments are:

- to teach students to become more self-directed and active in their studio work
- to supplement their textbook with color images and photographs (Although their text, *Drawing: A Creative Process* by Francis Ching, is excellent, it is limited in that all of the images are hand-drawn by the author and give only one perspective of the art and design world.)
- To teach students that the basic concepts we are using in Perceptual Drawing are not limited to the classroom and are actually in use by professional artists and designers all over the world and throughout history.

#### **Changing the class meeting structure**

Reducing the number of formal classes from three to two should give students a designated time for Outside Research (which can't be done in the studio) as well as time to revise work for their portfolios. It should also emphasize the importance of independent work and will keep me from unnecessarily hovering over the students so they can make their own aesthetic and technical decisions. Making one day more flexible will provide greater ease for my GTA and I to attend meetings, conferences and reviews that are often scheduled on Fridays.

#### **Dropping the 3D projects**

Limiting the assignments to drawing and research should tighten the focus on the unit and keep students from being spread too thin and from going in too many directions.

### B. DEVELOPING METHODS OF INQUIRY

---

The most important component of this Inquiry Portfolio is the Outside Research assignment. The structural change and the elimination of 3D projects are both facilitating the addition of Outside Research so I will limit my data collection to measuring the effectiveness of Outside Research.

### C. DATA COLLECTION

---

I will collect data in the form of student "reflections" turned in with each of the two portfolios. These written documents help me to understand what is not readily apparent in our class discussions. In the reflections, students will respond to the following question:

- How has Outside Research increased your "visual literacy"?

I will also give the following survey:

Outside Research was

- not helpful
- somewhat helpful
- very helpful

in increasing my understanding of the drawing exercises.

Outside Research was

- not helpful
- somewhat helpful
- very helpful

in expanding my knowledge of how artists and designers use similar concepts.

Outside Research is

- not likely
- somewhat likely
- very likely

to become a regular part of my studio practice.

Outside Research has

- not
- partially
- definitely

changed the way I look at the world.

### **PART III**

#### **A. DATA**

---

##### **Reflective Writing**

These 9 responses represent nearly 1/3 of my total number of students in this current rotation. I have selected them to reveal the diversity of comments included in the reflections. All of the reflection responses were positive regarding the value of outside research in developing “visual literacy.” No responses negated the comments excerpted here but some were less enthusiastic.

##### **Student Responses**

**Reflection Question:** How has Outside Research increased your “visual literacy?”

Most of my outside research I have taken from ads. I never paid as much attention to the amount of work that must go into advertising. Now, flipping through even clothes catalogs, I look at the set up and the way the photographer has chosen to portray a certain emotion or idea. It truly has made me more perceptive, I pay attention to things I never used to, because now they interest me and I have a better understanding of why they choose to make elements look a particular way. -Kjersti Scharf

Investigating the work of artists and other designers through outside research continues to inspire me with ideas of my own... Although I put a lot of focus on my drawing, I have learned that research is a first and important step in a drawing design process. This type of learning can be more useful and valuable to me than the final outcome and I aspire to continue my research even after the class is completed. -Kaysha Bucher

The outside research has remained a good method for orientation to new drawing techniques. Finding examples of a technique not only facilitates an understanding of its usefulness but also causes the researcher

to come across unrelated techniques that are just as useful. It is smart to include it as mandatory homework because it forces students to look with a trained eye on a regular basis. It is necessary for a person who is visually literate to be conditioned to view images and objects with a good understanding of why they are successful or not and what techniques have made them so, Outside research will be something that I use not only to find ideas for drawings in the future but also to continue to expand my understanding of what it means to be visually literate. –Spencer Smith

Through continued outside research, I have realized that organizational lines are used everywhere and have been used for many years. Architects like Michelangelo and LeCorbusier used them in their projects to show how different areas of the façade relate to other parts. Certain angles and positions of walls, windows and doors were determined by the reference of the organizational lines... I think we also use organizational lines mentally in our minds everyday. –Lindsey McCain

Research outside the studio has continued to help my observation of class concepts in the real world as well as improve my comprehension of concepts in the studio. Because I have to look for examples of light and time in outside sources, it strengthens my understanding of light and time in the studio setting and therefore has improved my drawings. I now look at the world around me in terms of lines, shapes, light and time. Besides giving me a new perspective and improving the quality of my observation, finding examples of the class concepts in the real world has allowed me to more accurately capture a subject and thus has improved my perceptual drawing skills as well. –Chelsea Leyland

The outside research the first half of this rotation helped with my homework. I would find pieces of art before I started my own project. It gave me an idea of the limits I had to work with and how to broaden my assignment. This was especially true when I was inspired by works of cross-contour/volume. When it came to value and light, the outside research just got me excited about that topic. When you see some of the amazing things that value and light can do with a piece of art or a building, you can't help but want to create something of your own. Many times it is not your outside research that is interesting, because you found it and were probably somewhat familiar with it. Instead it is other students' research, things that you never would have come up with concerning that topic. –Jill Graham

I think that outside research is one of the most interesting parts of this class. When we are able to share what we have found for a particular subject we are able to share how we all individually think about each subject. I think being able to share these ideas allows all to then look at our own pictures again and think about them in a new way. I think this is also a way for us to all stay in touch with the outside world... –Kestrel Lemen

The outside research was very helpful to the contents of my portfolio. I have learned that before you start with a project it is a good idea to look up examples of that style. They not only help you with ideas, but they open your eyes up to the world around you. Now my visual literacy has grown even more than before. I now notice the light source around me and I pick up on the shapes being created by the light. When I was researching time I found that there are tons of different ways to interpret time whether it is by motion, an artifact, or a shot of a brief moment in time. That really has opened my eyes to different ways to interpret art. I have grown so much in this class in a sense that my eyes are not the same when I look at the world; it is as if I got special glasses that are permanent now because I will always see things in a different light. –Michelle Koenig

I think that a lot of my improvement in this section has not just been a result of completing my projects, but also in completing the outside research. Many of our outside research topics are ones that I have to begin by actually researching the topic to learn what it is I am looking for before I can actually look for the images. This has made my assignments twice as important to my improvement. It creates a greater understanding of every assignment we receive... Another result I have noticed from doing the outside research is that I will observe these ideas everyday. I can see a billboard along the street, a painting in a book, a graphic design on the internet or an advertisement in a magazine and notice the use of positive and negative space or contour and cross-contour lines. The fact that I observe these things everyday now makes the outside research a continuing assignment for me. I don't hand in the assignment one day and never think about it again, I am constantly reviewing the past research I have done. –Lisa Herman

**Outside Research survey results**

25 students participated in the survey given in the final week of class.

1. Outside research was \_\_\_\_\_ in increasing my understanding of the drawing exercises.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Not helpful																									
Somewhat helpful																									
Very helpful																									

100% of the students surveyed indicated that Outside Research was helpful increasing their understanding of the drawing exercises.

2. Outside research was \_\_\_\_\_ in expanding my knowledge of how artists and designers use similar concepts.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Not helpful																									
Somewhat helpful																									
Very helpful																									

100% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research was helpful in expanding their knowledge of how artists and designers use similar concepts.

3. Outside research is \_\_\_\_\_ to become a regular part of my studio practice.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Not likely																									
Somewhat likely																									
Very likely																									

80% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research is likely to become a regular part of their studio practice.

4. Outside research has \_\_\_\_\_ changed the way I look at the world.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Not																									
Partially																									
Definitely																									

96% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research has changed the way they look at the world.

---

## B. ANALYSIS

---

### Reflective Writing

The students' reflective writing responses were heartening but I must keep in mind that they receive a grade for this assignment and they also know what I want to read. Either they truly value the Outside Research assignments or they know how to please me. Even so, I was impressed with the variety of positive responses and the details each of them used to describe how the assignment has increased their visual literacy. I was pleasantly surprised to read Jill's and Kestrel's comments about the value of sharing their Outside Research in class.

### Survey Responses

The survey responses provide a more objective and accurate reading of how these students feel about the Outside Research assignment. The survey responses were anonymous and were collected by a student so I would not know who gave which answers. The students' participation was voluntary and did not involve a grade. However, not all of the students were present at the time of the survey so I only have 25 responses instead of the 29 reflections. I typically have closer to 40 students divided into two sections in any given rotation so the 25 responses here are a relatively small sample. The survey responses support the reflective writing comments and demonstrate that the Outside Research assignment is indeed a valuable addition to my course. All of the students surveyed indicated that their Outside Research was helpful in increasing their understanding of the drawing exercises and helpful in expanding their knowledge of how artists and designers use similar concepts. Most of the students surveyed indicated that Outside Research is likely to become a regular part of their studio practice and that Outside Research has changed the way they look at the world.

**Central Question:** Will the conversion of some studio projects to Outside Research significantly benefit my students' learning?

**Answer:** Yes, my students' Outside Research and the related discussions resulted in significant learning benefits. The loss of some studio projects is more than offset by the gain in "visual literacy."

### Sub-questions:

**Q:** Will students develop a habit of conducting Outside Research after my course?

**A:** Yes for most of them since 80% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research is likely to become a regular part of their studio practice.

**Q:** Will students value Outside Research as supplement to the textbook?

**A:** Yes, 100% of the students surveyed indicated that Outside Research was helpful increasing their understanding of the drawing exercises.

Yes, 100% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research was helpful in expanding their knowledge of how artists and designers use similar concepts.

**Q:** Will the Outside Research teach students to look differently at their surroundings as they become more visually literate?

**A:** Yes, 96% of students surveyed indicated that Outside Research has changed the way they look at the world.

I will continue to include the Outside Research assignment in my Perceptual Drawing course because of its value as demonstrated by both the students' reflective writings and the survey results. Another change in the structure of the program will enable me to use Blackboard more effectively for each studio section. I plan to keep an archive of Outside Research examples for each exercise on Blackboard and may experiment with students submitting some of their images electronically as well.

## Handout

### Outside Research

Each week you will be assigned to conduct outside visual research that parallels your drawing explorations and will help to hone your visual literacy. *This research will benefit you the most if you do it before you begin your homework on the same subject.* This active learning process can help you to see and understand that the concepts from studio are used by artists and designers for visual problem solving nearly everywhere you look. The resulting increased awareness and understanding is part of what is meant by the term “visual literacy.” (This term goes well beyond being the title of your program, indeed it is something you will utilize throughout your career and life.) This work will *usually* be assigned on Wednesdays and due on Mondays. (Fridays are reserved for you to visit the library or look for relevant conditions out in the world.) Each week’s visual research will include:

- THREE photocopied or printed examples of the assigned visual topic  
These images can be:
  - Photocopies from books, magazines or other printed matter
  - Actual examples of printed matter (e.g. an exhibition announcement)
  - Printouts from internet images (a maximum of ONE from the internet each week)
  - Prints of digital photographs you have taken
- A written account of the image’s source, author, etc. and how it fits into the current week’s topic. This must be attached to the image.

Topic: Due Date:

Positive/Negative, Figure/Ground	Monday 3/21
Line/Edge	WEDNESDAY 3/23
Cross-contour/Volume	Monday 3/28
Regulating Line	Monday 4/4
Value/Light	Monday 4/11
Time	Monday 4/18

Outside research will be presented and discussed on the due date each week. If given your thoughtful attention, this activity should complement your drawing explorations and increase your awareness of art and design. You will be asked to comment on it for your graded portfolio reflection. Keep your visual research all in one place (either in your sketchbook or in your folder.) If you feel that you already have a good understanding of the topic in relation to what is due for homework, take this opportunity to EXPAND your understanding of the topic in new and unexpected ways.