Creating and Implementing Authentic Assignments:
Teaching with the “Working Collection” of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum

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Of even greater importance is the smaller working collection of the university, which fulfills in a general way the functions of a scientific laboratory. Nothing has more power to attract and hold the attention of students, to awaken and sustain their enthusiasm than the constant presence of the tangible remains of antiquity, the actual work of Greek and Roman hands. To students who by daily contact have become familiar with these things and understand their significance the men of old are real persons and their classical literature becomes the expression of a real life.

---The Classical Weekly, Harry Langford Wilson, 1908
Courses at the Museum:
2010-2016

- 231 courses (563 class meetings) taught in the museum
- >8000 student visits to the museum for class
- 80% undergraduate courses
- 11% graduate courses; 9% combination of undergraduate/graduate, high school or general public courses
- A majority of these courses involve handling and working directly with museum objects
- Courses have involved over thirty departments, programs and educational institutions
Is this a question I am genuinely curious about and don’t know the answer to?

Letter from A.J. Frothingham to JHU President Gilman, May 19, 1887
Image courtesy of the Johns Hopkins University Archives

Kylix signed by Phintias as painter, ceramic, Greek, 510 BCE, The Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum
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I knew that it was an experimental archaeology project, but I was not aware of quite how experimental it was. The idea that our teachers will be learning along with us is both exhilarating and terrifying. It is so different from the typical college course where the professor is an absolute authority on the subject and is there to pass on their knowledge to their students. Here we will all be learning together, and in an active, rather than a passive way. Thus, my extreme excitement.

Workshop journal entry, Anna Soifer, 1/29/15
Is the question big enough, and are the stakes high?
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Freshman Seminar on Technical Research

- 2 portraits from the Eton College Myers Collection
- Engage first year students in original research in an interdisciplinary manner
- Contribute to a scholarly conversation
- Make our findings publically accessible
- Funding support from the Deans Office, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University
Do I have a physical thing that can be the focus of sustained and weekly examination and research?
What methodology am I trying to teach?

**Course Description:**
This hands-on course in “experiential archaeology” brings together undergraduate students across disciplines to study the making of Athenian vases. Students work closely with expert ceramic artists, and in consultation with art historians, archaeologists, art conservators, and materials scientists to attempt to recreate ancient Greek manufacturing processes.

We will be apprentices to both contemporary and ancient potters over the next 13 weeks. The focus of this course is on the physical experience and process of recreating ancient Greek red figure vessels. We are extremely fortunate to have access to the Archaeological Museum’s rich holdings in red-figure vases, and we will consult them regularly in our recreation process. Our aim is to take seriously the physicality of these ancient objects, while also trying to understand something of their original contexts and material characteristics.

- “Recreate” a Greek kylix or cup by apprenticing to a master potter
- Examine objects in the museum’s collection for guidance and questions
- Consult with specialists
- Document—through writing, photography and film—the process
- Share observations and reflections with a broad audience
What kind of expertise is needed and who has it and will help?

Clockwise from top left: Alan Shapiro, Department of Classics; Online chats with Marc Walton, Northwestern University/Art Institute of Chicago; Paula Artal-Isbrand, Worcester Art Museum; Ilaria Cianchetta, Getty Conservation Institute; Kilnside chat with John Wissinger, potter and kiln builder.
Is my class of students disciplinarily diverse?

Johns Hopkins students recreate an iconic ancient Greek kylix

Mary Zajac / May 7, 2015
Posted in Politics+Society, Student Life, Arts+Culture
Tagged archaeological museum, pottery, program in museums and society

Student Participants:
Lauren Aldoroty
Madeleina Brancati
Hana Chop
Dane Clark
Savannah de Montesquiou
Ashley Fallon
Haley Huang
Kelly McBride
Gianna Puzzo
Travis Schmauss
Anna Soifer
Elizabeth Winkelhoff

Teaching Participants:
Sanchita Balachandran,
Matthew Hyleck, Camila Ascher, Ross Brendle

http://hub.jhu.edu/2015/05/07/recreating-ancient-greek-ceramics
Is my class of students disciplinarily diverse?

Building the Kiln, “Mysteries of the Kylix” (2015)
Is the class work challenging and is there a hands on component?
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Is there an enduring “deliverable” or a regular public component to the class?

• >12,300 page views of student blog during semester
• >20,000 “people reached” on Facebook
• ~4000 film views (and on view at the Museum of Antiquities, NSW, Australia, and the Worcester Art Museum)
• 3 radio spots on WYPR (Baltimore’s NPR station) with listenership of 13,000
• Exposure through Archaeology Magazine’s website and social media, Johns Hopkins publications, and the Baltimore Sun newspaper

https://vimeo.com/140393971
Do I see my students as collaborators?

- Fellow Makers: Matthew Hyleck, Patricia McGuiggan, Ross Brendle, Cami Ascher, Anastassia Solovieva, Karun Pandian
- Funding: Getty Conservation Institute; Elizabeth Rodini, Program in Museums and Society, Johns Hopkins University and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Denis Wirtz, The Office of the Provost, Johns Hopkins University and the Discovery Grant Award; Mary Louise Healey, Sue Porterfield
- Students: Lauren Aldoroty, Madalena Brancati, Dane Clark, Hana Chop, Streit Cunningham, Savannah de Montesquiou, Ashley Fallon, Haley Huang, Evan Krumheuer, Kelly McBride, Gianna Puzzo, Travis Schmauss, Anna Soifer, Elizabeth Winkelhoff, Arthur Zhang
- Filmmakers: Bernadette Wegenstein, Allen Moore, Maxwell Anderson, Daniela Mileykova, Daniel Contaldo
- Getty Conservation Institute: Reem Baroody, Dave Carson, Kathy Dardes, Anna Duer, Hanna Hoelling, Tom Learner, Gary Mattison, Nicole Onishi, Annabelle Sbarbatti, David Schow
- Museum of Fine Arts Boston: Jessie Arista, Christine Kondoleon, Phoebe Segal; Harvard Art Museums: Francesca Bewer, Amy Brauer, Angela Chang; Tony Siegel; Toledo Museum of Art: Suzanne Hargrove, Adam Levine, Scott Boberg, Kelly McGilvery, Emory University: Julianne Cheng
- Good folks: Diane Fullick, Anand and Uma Pandian, Lalitha and Ganesh Pandian, Devi and KB Nair
Am I ready not be in control of what we find out?
Authentic Assignment Checklist

✅ Is this a question I am genuinely curious about and don’t know the answer to?
✅ Is the question big enough, and are the stakes high?
✅ Do I have a physical thing that can be the focus of sustained and weekly examination and research?
✅ What methodology am I trying to teach?
✅ What kind of expertise is needed and who has it and will help?
✅ Is my class of students disciplinarily diverse?
✅ Is the class work challenging and is there a hands on component?
✅ Is there an enduring “deliverable” or a regular public component to the class?
✅ Do I see my students as collaborators?
✅ Am I ready not be in control of what we find out?
But What Did Students Learn Through That Assignment?

- Everything is more complicated than we think and merits repeated examination/re-examination
- Our work in the classroom produces unique specialized knowledge
- We can participate in and contribute to scholarly conversations
- We should broaden our own knowledge base and collaborate beyond our usual networks
- We must provide access to the knowledge we produce
- The process of trying to answer a question is more important than answering the question—and will lead to more interesting questions
- We can/must ask more daring questions