Western University
Department of Visual Arts
VAS/VAH 9500
Fall 2017
MFA/MA Seminar – Research Methods
Professor: Kelly Jazvac

Weekly Class: Wednesday 2:30-5:30
Room: VAC 247
E-mail: kjazvac@uwo.ca
Office Hours: Wednesday – 1:30-2:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The Master's seminar in research methods is the foundational course for the MFA in studio and the MA in art history. The course is an integrated context for reading, analysis of art works, and engagement with relevant practices, by studio and art history students, in a shared context. It combines a theoretical component with a methods component focusing respectively on the development of tools for art making, related writing, and the use of professional skills by artists; and on art historical research methods and the development of critical writing skills, and the use of professional tools by art historians. A general aim of the course is to help all students develop proficiency in reading and understanding texts, and engage in in-depth analysis and articulation regarding artworks, and hone production methods for both artistic and written work. Critical examinations of art and visual culture will expose students to a range of traditional and contemporary research methods and practices, and will lead to specific opportunities for individual examination and development of the student's own research methods and/or creative practices.

LEARNING OUTCOMES**:**
1. Students will develop skills to effectively engage in art historical research and writing, or, to effectively develop their own art practice, both materially and conceptually by drawing upon appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches.

2. Students will develop and hone critical reading and writing skills, including to emphasize the analyzing and contextualizing of theoretical texts, and the acquisition of knowledge of diverse institutional practices and research.

3. Students will gain exposure and familiarity with a broad range of current debates in the field of art history, visual culture and the art world, including by gaining awareness of the historical/theoretical ground upon which those debates are founded.

4. Students will have a demonstrable grasp of issues significant to the relationship between art history and art historical and institutional method; and/or art making and artists' research methods.

5. Students will develop analytical skills with respect to their own research methods as art historians, and artists, and use these skills to further hone their own practices.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS**:**
Students will complete one major final project (Studio Art students will develop a studio work and written component, Art History students will develop an art history project proposal and literature review); all students will engage in Methods Tests; all students will do one reading presentation; all students will engage in

a writing workshop pertinent to their areas of interest; and all students will complete a Grant Application, and engage in assigned readings.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND PREPARATIONS**:**
Students are expected to attend all classes punctually and prepared to participate in all class discussions and critiques. Students are required to come to all classes with the necessary materials to participate that day.

CLASS POLICIES:

Attendance
Attendance and punctuality are mandatory.

Extensions and Late Penalties

Extensions will be granted in exceptional circumstances and typically only in cases of illness, bereavement or for other compassionate reasons. Late assignments not accompanied by official documentation will receive a penalty of 2% per day. If you suspect that you will be unable to meet a deadline, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Submission of Work

Only typed hard copies of written assignments will be accepted. Art works must also be presented in person (not emailed or web-posted JPEGS of the artwork unless it is appropriate to the project). Email submissions and files saved to disks or memory sticks will not be accepted. Late essays must be submitted to the Visual Arts Main Office and date-stamped by the office staff.

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

All forms of plagiarism are serious academic offenses and are subject to strict penalties. All work must be your own, and when you rely on the research of others you must cite the provenance of the material in notes and bibliographies. When citing sources you must use the Chicago Manual of Style, Humanities format. Submitting the same work for credit in more than one course is plagiarism. When in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, consult with your professors and/or the Writing Centre ahead of the submission date.

Plagiarism, which may be defined as "The act or an instance of copying or stealing another's words or ideas and attributing them as one's own," will not be tolerated. (Citation excerpted from Black's Law Dictionary, 1999, 7th ed., p. 1170). (Refer to http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2013/pg113.html or the 2013/2014 Western Academic.

Respect

Any contravention of the UWO Code of Student Conduct or Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy will not be tolerated. Every effort will be made to foster and maintain a respectful environment.

OWL

Resources including most course readings will be posted to OWL. For copyright reasons these postings might be of short duration. If you wish to share resources with the class, consult with me and I will make arrangements so that the documents can be posted to Sakai, or distributed by other means.

Writing Centre: 217 UCC

The Writing Centre is part of the Effective Writing program at western and is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. It offers instruction on all aspects of writing and is not merely for students who have difficulty with writing. The one-on-one tutoring sessions can be very helpful in improving writing and editorial skills.

EVALUATION:

The following grading standards are quoted from the department webpage:
http://www.uwo.ca/visarts/grad/downloads/Graduate_Grading_Standards.pdf

90-100% Work of **excellent** quality

Approaching if not already at professional standards. Thoroughly and creatively engaged at a high level of artistic and/or written production; very high standards and sophistication evidenced in all areas of production

86-89% Work of **very good** quality

Demonstrably evolved beyond expected standards of critical, theoretical and creative engagement in artistic and/or written production

80-85% Work of **good** quality

Shows competence in artistic and/or written production but could be improved in one or more ways

78-79% Work of **acceptable** quality

Needs substantial improvement in one or more areas

70-77% Work of **passable** quality *(a warning regarding removal of funding)*

Shows sufficient ability and effort to allow the student to pass the course, but is seriously deficient with respect to critical, theoretical or practical engagement in artistic and/or written production

<69% Work of **unacceptable** quality

Removal from program

OVERALL COURSE GRADE WEIGHTING AND ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

A. General Assignments – both MA & MFA – 65%

I. Participation (10%) (all)

This mark will be determined by the extent and quality of your engagement in seminar discussions, presentations and workshops, critiques and other activities. You are expected to prepare for and contribute to every class as well as every discussion period following presentations or workshop. You are also expected to prepare at least one informed question per reading for each reading discussion, to be submitted on the day of the scheduled reading (not required for the person who is presenting that day).

Note that a strong attendance record is only the starting point for contributing to class discussions. For example, perfect attendance as a passive participant, and/or as a disruptive presence – arriving late, leaving early, failing to prepare, surfing technology, distracted listening, conversational asides, etc. – will not meet the minimum requirement for graduate seminars. This mark also assesses students' organizational skills, skills that will be essential when you become contributing professionals.

II. Reading Presentation & Short Written Summary: 15% (all)

Each student will be responsible for presenting on, and leading the discussion for one reading.
1.**The overall presentation should be approximately 20 minutes in duration and provide the class with a good contextual background for the reading/work, as well as a working draft of the writer's main argument(s) and at least one solid discussion question to get the conversation going. You will need to do additional research to round out your presentation**. The group discussion **(25 minutes)** will then be used to further develop the draft, as well as work through ideas in the texts. The instructor will model this presentation on the first day of class. The reading component of the course is intended to practice critical reading and analysis as it applies to art, and develop professional presentation experience. Specific readings also pertain to research/practice methods pertinent to the course.

2. **Written Assignment of the Presenter:** Begin by *briefly* (brief is challenging!) summarizing the author's argument in a few sentences, and demonstrate your awareness of the context of the argument (or artwork) regarding the wider field of art history or art discourse/practice. Follow this by a short synthesis that identifies a few (2-3) key issues of particular interest. The total paper should be 250-300 words. To be handed in the week after your presentation so you may integrate the class' discussion of your presentation into your summary.

III. Writing Workshop (10%) (all)

On Oct. 12 we will conduct a Writing Workshop. To prepare for this class, each student will do the following:

Studio Art: choose a short example of an artist's writing (1-3 paragraphs) and conduct an analysis of how the artist writes about his or her work. For class, the student will come prepared with the **chosen text in PDF format** (for projection), as well as a two page written supported argument in hardcopy for why (or why not) the student considers this writing effective, and what language or strategies the student could potentially adopt for their own work. We will then discuss the findings with each other and compile strategies.

Art History: choose a short example of a curator's writing (1-3 paragraphs) about an exhibition and conduct an analysis of how the curator approaches the task. For example, this could be the introductory wall text found in most museum exhibitions (in some cases the author may simply be the AGO or Oakville Galleries, as not all introductory texts are individually authored). Choosing an exhibition that you also saw in person is preferred, and will make your job easier. Note that this assignment is due the week after reading week so you can plan any trips accordingly. For class, the student will come prepared with the **chosen text in PDF format**, as well as a two page written supported argument for why (or why not) the student considers this writing effective, and what language or strategies are at play in the writing. We will then discuss the findings with each other and compile strategies.

IV. Grant Proposal: 10% (all)

Using the grant guidelines, you will write the proposal page for a SSHRC, OGS or Canada Council grant application following a grant writing workshop presented by Professors Sarah Bassnett and Kelly Jazvac on September 20th. If you are already funded by one of these grants, choose another grant to apply for in order to maximize your learning opportunities. **Regardless of which grant the students choose, they are**

expected to read and familiarize themselves with the SSHRC and OGS guidelines before the workshop.

V. Method Tests (20%) (all)

Each student in the class will complete 5 method tests over the semester. If the student is presenting on the reading, then they will be exempt from the method test that week.

Studio Art: Each student will be responsible for assigning their fellow MFA's a 'Method Test' on a given day, as well as carrying out the Method Tests assigned to them by their peers. For the Test, students will try out a suggested 'method' in the making of their studio work. Prior to the following classtime, students will present their tests for the purposes of discussion in class. Students are also expected to be prepared for discussion as to why (or why not) the test was generative/useful. Of interest here is not the finished artworks you made, but the generative possibilities of the method you used to develop artworks. Evaluation of these tests will be determined by the rigour with which students apply and experiment with the test, as well as verbal analysis in class. When assigning a method test to the class, students **will need to come up with a plan that allows for all mediums to participate in the test.** If stuck for an idea, course readings will offer some suggestions

An example of some possible Studio Art method tests:

1. Use a medium you've never used before to explore your MFA project.
2. Make an audio recording at a location of your choice in London, then make an artwork from it that applies to your MFA project.

Art History: Each student will be responsible for assigning their fellow MA's a 'Method Test' on a given day, as well as carrying out the Method Tests assigned to them by their peers. For the Test, students will try out a suggested 'method' in how they approach either the analysis and/or written communication of artworks. Prior to the following classtime, students will present their tests for the purposes of discussion in class. Students are also expected to be prepared for discussion as to why (or why not) the test was generative/useful. Of interest here is not the finished outcome you produced, but the generative possibilities of the method you used to develop your ideas and output.

Evaluation of these tests will be determined by the rigour with which students apply and experiment with the test, as well as verbal analysis in class. When assigning a method test to the class, students **will need to come up with a plan that allows for a research focus in differing historical periods and geographies to participate in the test.**

Some examples of possible method tests:

1. Find an example from popular culture that applies to your area of art historical research. Present images that illustrate the linkages between the two areas. Write a paragraph about how the pop culture reference helps us to consider the art historical. Convince your colleagues that this is the case.
2. Sit in front of an artwork and write a poem.
3. Come up with an elevator pitch for your thesis project. Exaggerate extensively to make it sound as splashy as possible.

B. Art History-Specific Assignment (35%)

I. Literature Review & Project Proposal with Research Question and Annotated Bibliography

1750-2000 words/review and proposal 7-8 pages, plus Annotated Bibliography (minimum 2 pages)

This assignment will describe the aims of a major research project. Be specific about your objects of study – artists, art movements, institutions, geopolitical context, etc. – and your method (historical overview, archival

research, theoretical exploration, ideological critique, institutional analysis, multidisciplinary, etc.). Are you using separate case studies to explore an issue, or is your project focused on a single object (artist, art movement, medium, etc.)? How does the project contribute to the existing scholarship? This last question is what makes the literature review crucial. The review situates the project to explain how it fills a void. If there is little literature on your topic it might be because there is a paucity of archival research that you aim to rectify (name the location of the archives, and what you expect to discover). If the objects have already generated scholarship, explain how you will expand on it. If you are revisiting or challenging received wisdom on familiar topics (e.g. Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War, the Group of Seven and nationalism, etc.), explain the intersections and divergences between and among the ideological critiques that inform your own politicized approach to the subject. Your literature review will likely include a brief description of more than one intersecting field of scholarship: historical, theoretical, archival, etc.

Apparatus: Bibliography & Other Supporting Materials: The bibliography reflects your research journey, a journey which might have seemed to yield "dead ends," but constitutes the "deep background" for this project and reflects broader knowledge of the field, and charts the literature you consulted during both the research and writing stages. To generate the list, consider the following questions: what sources most inform your research? What is the conventional wisdom, and what are the points of dissent, on your subject? What would your readers need to consult to get a fuller picture of your topic? Note that the bibliography should include critical annotations that provide a brief analysis of the role of the work in informing the student's own research.

Depending on the thesis, the apparatus varies a great deal, but it generally consists of materials, other than endnotes and the bibliography, that support your analysis, including: images, diagrams, maps, capsule biographies, chronologies, list of exhibitions, statistics, etc. Briefly explain what apparatus you will likely generate, and submit what you have produced so that I can provide feedback.

C. Studio-Specific Assignment (35%)

I. Applying a Theoretical/Textual Source Project (studio component + written component) (35%)

STUDIO COMPONENT DUE FOR CRITIQUE Dec. 6
WRITTEN COMPONENT DUE BY Dec. 13

Students will identify a reading that they feel connects with their studio practice in some way. Students are encouraged to use a reading on the course reading lists, as some feature writings on artists' methodologies; however, students may also choose another relevant text in consultation the instructor (if the student chooses this option, they will also be responsible for distributing the text to their peers). From there, students will conduct further research into a key primary source cited within the text. For example, if a reading heavily cites Foucault, the student would then read the original Foucault sources the author references (in other words, the primary source), and use that reading as his or her starting point for further research.

Drawing from this expanded research, students will make an artwork that in some way utilizes (materially, conceptually, topically, etc.) the methods/ideas presented in the text to develop the artwork, or think through its analysis. **Students are encouraged not to illustrate a theory via an artwork, but rather, use the texts as a tool for making complex and sophisticated artworks and/or analyses.**

A subsequent three-page paper is due on Dec. 13 that applies concepts identified in your relevant research to the artwork you have presented for critique. You are encouraged to use the critique format on Dec. 6 to help you hone your argument for the written component, due the following week.