The Campus Art Museum: A Qualitative Study
Preface

A Report to the The Samuel H. Kress Foundation

By
Corrine Glesne
# Table of Contents

- **The Campus Art Museum: A Qualitative Study: Preface** 4
- Research Questions 4
- Methods 4
- The Report/s 6
- **Acknowledgements** 7
- **Sources** 8
The Campus Art Museum: A Qualitative Study: Preface

At least 700 academic institutions in the United States have an art museum or exhibition gallery (Russell & Spencer 2000, 6). We know attendance at American art museums in general has risen nearly four-fold in the last fifty years (Cuno 2004, 17), but we know less about the experiences within the academic art museum. How do students, faculty, and the public make use of campus art museums and how do the museums enrich personal and academic lives? What do academic art museums and galleries contribute to their parent organizations and communities? What institutional factors help them thrive? These questions, among others, were discussed at national meetings attended by staff of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. They proposed that the Kress Foundation sponsor a study to look at campus art museums. I was subsequently commissioned to undertake a year-long study beginning in the fall of 2010.1

Research Questions

The study could not address everything that can be associated with campus art museums. It does not, for example, focus on the development and use of exhibitions, care of collections, use of technology, strategic planning for the future, or why some students and faculty do not use the museum. Rather, we sought to describe the overall impact of the exemplary campus art museum on the people who make use of it.2 We settled on four research questions:

1. In what ways are exemplary campus art museums integrated into the academic lives of students and faculty?
2. How do students, faculty, and the public interact with campus art museums beyond the academic curriculum?
3. What institutional cultures and structures support campus art museums and what major challenges stretch them?
4. How have works of art distributed through the Great Kress Giveaway fifty years ago been used and what difference, if any, have the gifts made for the museums, students, faculty, and communities where they were bestowed?

Methods

The “exemplary” campus art museum became the focus of the study in order to learn from museums that perceive themselves as models for others. The

1. Corrine Glesne, a qualitative researcher and educational anthropologist, taught at the University of Vermont for seventeen years and is author of the text Becoming Qualitative Researchers.
2. When “we” is used in this report it refers to my discussions with staff at the Kress Foundation. The Kress Foundation played an important role in setting up the study. Responsibility for data collection and interpretation resides with me. Any errors, therefore, are my own.
study began with a possible research population of the twenty-three academic art museums that received collections from the Kress Foundation. The first sampling strategy was to determine which of these might be exemplary. This could be described as “extreme case” sampling, defined as “selecting cases that are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way, such as outstanding successes or notable failures” (Patton 2002, 230-31) 3 Staff at campus art museums with Kress Collections were sent letters, asking for those who identify their museum as exemplary and who had compelling stories about their campus art museum. If interested in participating in the study, they were asked to submit letters detailing how they perceived their museum to be exemplary of what the campus art museum at its best can be or become. We received thirteen responses. One museum was used to pilot the research. Eleven of the remaining provided compelling evidence of exemplarity.

Maximum variation sampling was then used to select five cases that varied widely on indicators that situate campus art museums differently: private/public institutions, large/small campus populations, and rural/urban locations. Because of the geographic proximity of several potential sites and their persuasive letters responding to the invitation for participation, the study was widened to include two more sites with briefer stays. The resulting sites ranged from Ohio to Arizona, with most in the Midwest. Four sites are public universities and three are private institutions. Two sites are in urban settings (over one million inhabitants), one is in a rural small town (8,000 inhabitants), and the other four are in small to mid-sized cities of 80,000 to 300,000. The number of students enrolled in the institutions varies from fewer than 3,000 to over 40,000 students. Four museums had received grants through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s College and University Art Museum Program, and three had not.4

Through assistance of campus art museum personnel, interviews were scheduled with the museum director at each institution and with museum curators, educators and other staff; with university/college professors in the arts and in humanities, science, and other disciplines; with campus administrators and students; and with alumni, docents, volunteers, museum security personnel, board members, and a few public school teachers. Interview sessions lasted, in general, an hour, sometimes longer. In total, 129 people were interviewed and their words transcribed and analyzed along with observational fieldnotes. Participants were promised confidentiality. Therefore, in the report, quotations are generally identified by the interviewee’s position and sometimes by institution, but never by the interviewee’s name.

3. Qualitative research generally relies on purposeful sampling in which the major selection strategies are aimed at getting the most information-rich cases (Patton 2002, 230). Frequently employed selection strategies include maximum variation sampling, typical case sampling, homogeneous sampling, extreme case sampling, among others. Patton cites both In Search of Excellence, a study of America’s best-run companies, and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, a study of highly successful leaders, as examples of studies that relied on extreme case sampling strategies, in that they sought programs and leaders that exemplified excellence.

4. During the site selection process, we noticed that a number of the campus art museums interested in the Kress study were among those that had received large, multi-year grants as part of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s important College and University Art Museum Program (Goethals and Fabing, 2007) which focused on academic integration of campus art museums. We decided that the Kress study should make an effort to include both campus art museums that had received such grants as well as others that had not.
The Report/s

The study is written as four reports, each one focused on one of the research questions described above. Each report can be read independent of the other reports. Therefore some repetition about the overall study will be found on the first few pages of each, usually inserted as footnotes. The reports are briefly summarized below. Results from this study are meant to enhance institutional and public recognition of the contributions campus art museums can make to multiple constituencies and to help identify how the philanthropic sector can best serve campus art museums.

Around fifty years ago, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation distributed works of art to two-dozen colleges and universities throughout the United States, and eighteen regional museums in addition to the National Gallery of Art, in what has been referred to as “The Great Kress Giveaway.” The first report, Effects and Influences of “The Great Kress Giveaway,” helps shed light on how these works of art have been used and what differences the gifts have made for museums, students, faculty, and communities. The report addresses how the Kress works provided legitimacy and credibility for new campus museums and were responsible, in some cases, for the very formation of a campus art museum. It shows how the Kress donations have bolstered arguments for more gallery space or museum renovations, for new staff positions, and consistently have served to attract further donations to the museums’ collections, complementing objects donated by Kress. The works are valued for research projects that vary from art history essay assignments to dissertations to extensive scientific research undertaken through the collaboration of several institutions. Most all the Kress pieces are on permanent display, serving as an anchor and mainstay for museum tours and educational programs. They are widely used in art history classes, but also in other courses including religion, music, area studies, history, and business. Finally, the Kress gifts have provided access to art of a high caliber in areas where such access has been limited, and for that, people are especially grateful.

Art Across the Curriculum focuses on academic involvement, on the acts of thinking, learning, experiencing, and creativity enabled by campus art museums. It addresses the ways in which campus art museums reach out to faculty in support of teaching and research, and how the art museums help faculty achieve various educational objectives. Each objective is discussed with examples, demonstrating how faculty across the curriculum are using the campus art museum, sometimes initiated on their own, but often assisted by museum personnel. It looks at different modes of collaboration among faculty and museum staff, including ways in which museum exhibitions are constructed or interpreted for use in academic classes and how faculty’s expertise and research are incorporated into exhibitions. The report also considers ways in which the Mellon Foundation, in particular, has assisted in activating the academic integration of art across the curriculum.

Museum Art in Everyday Life explicates how students, faculty, and the public interact with the campus art museum beyond the academic curriculum and what meaning the campus art museum holds for study participants. This report identifies factors that have influenced participants’ interest in art and art museums:

The Campus Art Museum: A Qualitative Study: Preface
exposure to art as a child, a course in art history, a job in an art museum/gallery, and visits to art museums. It discusses how the campus art museum is used as a refuge and as a place for social outings; as a venue for campus and community events; and as a place of employment. It also touches upon ways in which the campus art museum sometimes influences decisions to come to a particular institution; guides decisions about future studies, careers, or avocations; and affects perspectives on oneself as well as on the college/university.

**Challenges and Conditions of Success for the Campus Art Museum** identifies challenges for campus art museums and ways in which exemplary museums are addressing them. It explores how various campus histories and cultures have helped set the context for support of campus art museums. Although museums may have supportive histories and cultures, this does not mean they have escaped difficult times. These difficult periods for the museum have often paralleled a hiatus in museum direction and leadership. A section of the report, therefore focuses on museum directors and staff and the difference inspirational leadership can make. Circumstances sometimes make things seemingly impossible even for committed leaders. The major “circumstance” facing museums during this study was the economic recession that began in 2008. Some institutions are enduring budget cuts that put their future in question. The report attends to these difficulties. Despite or perhaps because of the current budget crisis, some campus communities are arguing that the art museum is more important than ever. The final section provides testimony to the usefulness and contributions of campus art museums.

**Acknowledgements**

Numerous people helped make this study possible. Particular thanks go to the museum directors (Alex Barker, Heidi Gealt, Charles Guerin, Saralyn Reece Hardy, Anthony Hirschel, Charles Loving, Stephanie Wiles) and their staff who made sure that my days in their museums were full to over-flowing with people to interview and programs to attend. Thanks also to them and the students, faculty, campus administrators, docents, and others who spent time openly talking with me about their perspectives on and experiences with campus art museums. Much appreciation goes to Max Marmor and Lisa Schermerhorn at the Kress Foundation for responding immediately with any inquiry I had regarding the study. I am grateful to friends Glenda Bissex, Chas Jansen, Marleen Pugach, and Michael Strauss who read unwieldy drafts and whose comments helped immeasurably in shaping the manuscripts. And special thanks go to Karen Arnold who suggested my participation. I have learned much.
Sources


