

Integrating 3D Printing into the Art History Curriculum (IRB 14933)

There is no local art museum with ancient material for students taking art history classes. To mitigate this and to give students the experience of viewing art from antiquity, in Autumn 2015, Fine Arts majors and non-majors enrolled in the first of a two-part introductory world art history survey sequence were given an assignment incorporating 3D printed sculptures. Material was selected from Prehistoric to Medieval times, western and non-western works of art, complementing course content. Resources were generously provided by Washington State University's Academic Outreach and Innovation.

In this pilot study, qualitative research took the form of pre- and post-assignment questionnaires and student reflections. Individually, students analyzed a pair of sculptures. The overarching goals were to engage introductory level students new to the history of art by providing an experience working with three-dimensional versions of real works of art and, concurrently, to motivate majors and students familiar with the history of art by learning about and viewing lesser known pieces related to topics introduced in class.

Studying printed sculptures had a demonstrable impact on how students approached three-dimensional work; highlighting the important experience of analyzing a work in person. For example, students generally found that it was preferable to approach sculpture as a whole before turning to details. In addition, students noted the importance of the angle of viewing when identifying and presenting visual evidence.

Currently, I am conducting a broader study. The focus of this investigation is whether 3D printed models have the potential to help students learn better as part of both the introductory and upper-level art history curriculum.