



Art History: Using Problem-Based Learning to introduce art history

A course entitled "Myth, Religion, and Art" by Mark Parker Miller, the University of Delaware Wilmington Campus, Division of Continuing Education (1996)

Course Design:

The course focuses on the many ways in which spiritual beliefs impact the creation of works of art, and it draws from various cultures from around the world and throughout history. The course is designed for non-majors and has no prerequisites. The course meets once per week for three hours; students are divided into groups of five. In the first hour of the course, students from each group discuss their group's response to the previous week's problem. In the second hour of the course, the instructor presents new topics through a lecture accompanied by slides or video and a class discussion of the assigned readings. In the last hour of each weekly meeting, the instructor distributes the next week's problem and allows for the groups to work through the assigned problem and to plan their written response which is due at the beginning of the next class period.

The problems assigned each week are designed to deepen student understanding of a particular form of religious architecture and its possible roles, to encourage students to use appropriate resources for finding out more about the form and function of a particular kind of religious architecture, and to promote the critical thinking skills necessary to solve complex art history questions.

Higher Level Learning:

The weekly problems enable students to work toward making a connection between the information presented by the instructor and the historical and cultural circumstances in which spirituality has influenced works of art (**Connecting**). In order to make that connection, students must become proficient researchers and learn to pick out relevant information from the vast body of information that might potentially relate to their weekly topic (**Acting, Learning**).

Active Learning:

Students gain a deeper understanding of the religious elements of art history through their own research and critical analysis of the weekly problems (**Doing**). In addition to receiving input from the instructor and observing his modeling of professional analysis of the weekly problems, students are able to compare their approach to the approaches of other groups toward the same problem (**Observing**). The similarities and differences in opinions and approaches, in turn, fuel class discussions (**Dialogue with Others**).

Miller, M. P. (1996). Introducing Art History Through Problem-based Learning. *Newsletter of the Center for Teaching Effectiveness*, Spring 1996. [Online] Available: <http://www.udel.edu/pbl/cte/spr96-arth.html> (02/12/99)