**Summary of GUR Link pilot, “Formulating Beliefs: A Multicultural Exploration,” Fall 2013**

**Faculty Members:**

Sylvia Tag, Librarian & Associate Professor, Wilson Library

Julia Sapin, Associate Professor, Art History

**Course titles:**

Library 201, Introduction to Research Strategies – GUR: Communication Block (CCOM)

Art History 271, Visual Culture in East Asia – GUR: Comparative Gender & Multicultural Studies Block (ACGM)

This link was an experiment joining a small seminar-style class (LIBR201) with a large lecture class (A/HI271), both courses jointly focusing on Competency #1, to “Analyze & communicate ideas effectively in oral, written, and visual forms.” This competency was achieved differently in each course, in LIBR201, through class assignments on formulating inquiry, locating print and online resources to support an argument, analyzing and interpreting a variety of sources for authority and authenticity, and incorporating material from sources into writing, and in A/HI271, through participation in Online Learning Communities and class discussion about primary sources, video, poetic and visual forms, and assessed through blog-writing and essay-writing on exams. The hope was that the linked aspect of the course would enhance students’ ability to achieve this competency.

During a Writing Instruction Support retreat that Sylvia and Julia both attended in August 2013, they developed the linked aspect of the course by working through the overarching pedagogical theory driving this particular retreat, the idea of the “threshold concept,” which Dr. Carmen Werder has described as a “discipline-based concept that provides a transformational understanding and entrance to that discipline.” Sylvia and Julia found a threshold concept that helped to bind their courses together: “Data are not only textual but also visual and oral; there are data beyond texts.” This concept became the organizing principle for how the Link would function.

**Link Activities:**

While LIBR201 students focused on examination of information systems, specifically the creation, dissemination, and use of information through archival, contemporary, and developing resources while learning to articulate their individual biases in their research process and cultural perspectives in societal information systems, and A/HI271 students were working on becoming familiar with East Asian visual cultures and the religious, social, and cultural environments in which they were created through practicing visual analysis as a tool for cultural interpretation, the primary textual and visual sources used in A/HI271 formed the basis for the shared discussions in which both instructors participated.

We had 3 joint visits:

1. Visit to Special Collections-discussion of fan with calligraphy on it, WWU history, history of calligraphy, documentary nature of calligraphy. (Fan commemorating Asia University’s relationship with Beijing Normal University, used as its standard gift to give other universities)

2. Field trip to see Do Ho Suh’s sculpture in Academic Center West. Discussion of work in the context of authenticity, in the context of Asian and contemporary art history, and its symbolic context.

3. Meeting in Western Gallery to look at Japanese prints: looked at a range of prints from the 18th-20th centuries.

4. Julia also attended the LIBR201 presentations of students’ “This I Believe” essays during finals week.

**Link Reflection:**

Sylvia composed a survey for Link student so that we could learn about their experiences:

1. How did you hear about the LIBR201–A/HI271 link?
2. What do you think of the comparative class sizes for LIBR201 and A/HI271?
3. Professor Sapin did three presentations for LIBR201: Library Special Collections Chinese Calligraphy, Academic West Do Ho Suh’s *Cause & Effect*, and the Western Art Gallery Japanese Prints. How do you think these visits effected the link experience?
4. Besides the planned presentations by Professor Sapin, where else in the course curriculum of LIBR201 and/or A/HI271 did you experience links? For example, through assignments, readings, or your own ideas.
5. Do you have suggestions for improving the linked experience?
6. Provide a personal assessment of your progress in the areas of oral, written and visual analysis and communication.

**Student responses indicated:**

It is important to list announcements of the LINK in a number of places—with GURs, send e-m—the more places they can discover them the better. Some heard about it via word-of-mouth.

Students seemed to want more linkages between classes, wanted their activities more closely linked. In this case they were expecting more of an art focus, but they also wanted more analysis of sources in my survey class, that would coincide with what they were learning in LIBR201.

**Students mentioned liking:**

-having access to both professors “on a personal level”

-interacting with actual materials

-seeing links re how different media “can be used as a tool for expressing one’s opinions.”

-different perspectives on materials in the lecture class, getting a chance to gain greater depth re those materials.

**Suggestions from students:**

-Students recommended visit(s) of smaller class instructor to larger class (if in fact the Link joins classes of disparate sizes)—to raise awareness of the links and to bring a different perspective to the larger class.

**Initial statistics:** The grade average for the larger class was C+, while the grade average for the Link was B-. We would need further data to help us discern whether this is in part due to the self-selection of the students, that is, if students who would sign up for a Link may be higher-achieving students in the first place or the linked material itself helped the students be higher-achieving.

**Conclusions:**

Both Julia and Sylvia agree that the planning time at the Writing Instruction Support retreat was crucial to the success of the link. While retreat attendance is not essential for all LINK courses, dedicated planning time to formulate a threshold concept is highly recommended. The reflections indicated that the link was an overall success from the students’ perspective. For Julia and Sylvia, there was the added benefit of collegial, pedagogical, and scholarly interactions. Building and modeling a culture of communication across disciplines is satisfying, and dare we say, inspiring on many levels for faculty. That was certainly our experience.