



PURM

Perspectives on Undergraduate
Research & Mentoring

Bringing Study Abroad back to Campus: A Collaborative Student Project on Acquiring, Researching and Exhibiting Artifacts

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Overview and Background

From fall 2016 to spring 2017, a curricular and student research project was launched with the support of a grant from Elon University's Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL). This project supported student research in three contexts, two countries and two disciplines. The grant was used by students in a study abroad course "China: the Flying Dragon" in January 2017 to each purchase one artistic object based on pre-departure research. These objects later joined the Elon University permanent art collection. In spring 2017, another group of students in the course "History of Material Culture in China and Japan" each researched the historical meaning and cultural significance of one piece. After the students finished their preliminary research, CATL, Elon Art Collection and the Department of History and Geography worked together to design an on-campus art exhibit in April 2017 to showcase students' research.

This essay presents an overview of the planning and research processes of this collaborative student project. It offers a conversation from multiple perspectives, including the voices of the faculty members, staff members, and administrative members who oversaw and facilitated the project, as well as students who engaged in the research and curation. The article illustrates how the undergraduate research and the study abroad experience mutually enhanced student learning and, ultimately, connected students with a broader public audience through the art exhibit. It also demonstrates how a collaborative student research project can be used as an engaging tool to bring the short-term study abroad experience back to campus and mentor cross-disciplinary undergraduate research.

The collaborative student project combined experiential learning in the short-term study abroad course, innovative research projects in the upper-level course, and hands-on training for student workers in the Elon Art Collection. These linked assignments aimed to a) enhance the study abroad and history learning experience, b) encourage cross-course, trans-disciplinary collaboration, c) facilitate the sharing of student research beyond the conventional formats and locations, and d) contribute to the enhancement of the Elon Art Collection and engagement with Asian culture.

¹ Dr. Duan was at Elon University from 2015 to 2018, and the courses discussed in this article were taught during this period.

Project Description

The CATL Teaching and Learning Grant supported the project by covering student purchase costs and part of the expense for the art exhibit and reception where students presented their research. The CATL Teaching and Learning grants support “innovative, inclusive and/or research-based teaching and learning projects, including grants to experiment with innovative teaching or learning strategies or assignments, pilot engaged learning strategies in a curriculum with an evidence-based approach, or evaluate the impact of innovative and/or engaged teaching strategies in a course” (Little, 2017).

Literature Review

Because of the complex and multidimensional nature of this project, this literature review draws on various areas of scholarly inquiry into high-impact teaching practices, including research on study abroad and on mentored undergraduate research, as well as scholarship on researching and teaching history using material culture. We outline relevant findings from each strand of scholarship as they apply to this multi-course project.

Undergraduate research is a high-impact educational initiative that emphasizes the academic interest of course content and builds students’ academic competency (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2007), in this case, their research and writing skills. Undergraduate research explores “a focused, discrete body of knowledge in preparation for developing a research question, a research agenda, and a research product” (McNary-Zak & Peters, 2011, p. 2). Participation in undergraduate research is proven to be essential for improving students’ class-engagement and intellectual growth (Webber, Nelson Laird, & BrckaLorenz, 2013; Lopatto, 2010). Scholars conclude that the benefits of undergraduate research include richer engagement with a focused content area, honing critical thinking, research, writing and presentation skills, and building competence and confidence (McNary-Zak & Peters, 2011). As Lopatto (2006) argues, undergraduate research helps to “realize the goal of liberal education” (p. 23) because it fosters both personal growth and professional skills. While conventional undergraduate research often assumes the form of honors research, summer projects, or independent study, this article explores undergraduate research in connection with a study abroad experience.

Scholars have recognized the important administrative role played by study abroad programs (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017), but further research on how study abroad programs academically influence undergraduate research needs to be undertaken. The outcomes of and measures to improve study abroad programs have long been investigated. In 2004, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) studied 3,723 former study abroad students over the previous 50 years and found that “study abroad has a significant impact on students in the areas of continued language use, academic attainment measures, intercultural and personal development, and career choices” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 161). Scholars in general regard intercultural development (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) and experiential learning (Hatcher & Watkins, 2016) as the primary areas that students benefit from during study abroad.

A central and growing concern of study abroad educators is the extent to which students are learning (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). To respond to this question, some scholars argue that “a carefully guided, interventionist approach facilitates significant intercultural learning prior to, during, and after the study abroad experience” (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012, p. 261). This paper explores such an attempt of intervening through connecting mentored research and public presentation components with study abroad. Below we demonstrate how the off-campus element contributed to undergraduate research as a high-impact practice from two perspectives: enhancing students’ motivation by invoking different cultures that material objects carry and making the research public through collaborations among different classes and programs.

This article focuses on how the study abroad components contributed to and reshaped undergraduate research centered on material culture. In recent years, the realization that objects have meaning and resonance beyond their ostensible purpose inspired the “material turn” in humanities and social science research (Ebrey & Huang, 2017; Yonan, 2011). In the field of Chinese history, interdisciplinary scholarship on book culture, medicine, technology, and religions draw extensively on archaeological artifacts, objects, and illustrated texts (Hegel, 1998; Kieschnick, 2002). These studies raise questions that link visuality and materiality with other facets of social and cultural experience.

The use of visual culture in the classroom has long been recognized by researchers. For example, nearly four decades ago, Arnheim (1969) offered his theory about the importance of material culture in the classroom and asserted the “central function of art in general education” (p. 296). However, fostering students’ research ability to view objects critically did not become a pedagogical concern until the emergence of the recent research trend. When discussing the central role of critical perception in material culture pedagogy, Sienkewicz (2013) suggests that material culture could transform the “boundaries and definitions of critical thinking in the college classroom” (p. 119). Scholars of material culture usually recognize that thinking and viewing are interconnected, and perhaps unsurprisingly, their research on the pedagogical uses of material culture investigates methods that enable students to link seeing to cognition (Sienkewicz, 2013, p. 124). This article focuses on the ways that introducing everyday objects into the classroom fosters students’ critical viewing and deepens cultural knowledge, while also improving undergraduate research skills. The two Chinese culture courses discussed below consider how people have used “things” to articulate and advance their desire. The design of student projects in both courses allowed students to examine how objects functioned in traditional life and contributed to the formation of East Asian cultural norms. This research demonstrates that materiality not only helped students to explore the way of seeing as an approach to interpreting social and cultural engagement, but also sparked discussion on cross-disciplinary work in religious studies, art history, global studies, and social history. What follows is a detailed description of the project as it unfolded in three stages—artifact purchase in winter course, student research in spring course, and art exhibit curation.

Stage One: The Winter Study Abroad

The study abroad course focused on helping students decide which object to purchase and on learning to navigate a foreign cultural environment. The class contained 18 students, including six sophomores, seven juniors, and five seniors. Their majors were diverse, including but not limited to political science, music studies, mathematics, business, and journalism. In the fall 2016 preparatory course, students were prepared for this task through lectures, in-class discussions, and a group research project. First, during lecture, both instructors, Drs. Honglin Xiao and Xiaolin Duan, engaged students with material culture to broaden their knowledge of different cultures and cultivate their awareness to use objects as alternative historical sources. Secondly, when introducing the winter course itinerary, instructors created a manual that explained briefly what each city was known for culturally, along with several suggestions for possible objects to purchase (Table 1). The class discussed which types of artifacts might be more or less appropriate for purchase and students articulated criteria for selecting an object. For example, when students asked whether they could purchase a toy stuffed panda souvenir, instructors used this to spark discussion. In the end, students agreed that the objects for purchase need to carry cultural significance, represent certain historical periods, and/or embody ethnographic value. Thirdly, all 18 students were divided into smaller groups to work on a research project that would be carried through to the winter. The research assignment was designed as a group activity, as opposed to individual projects, because most of the students had not been exposed to Chinese culture or historical research before, so the group project allowed them to contribute their respective expertise more confidently. Starting the

group projects before departure also enabled them to become familiar with other class members, which helped them navigate successfully during the study abroad.

Table 1.
Example of the Manual Provided for Winter Students

City	Featured Material Objects
Beijing	The capital city since the fourteenth century, known for folk painting of northern China, painted masks for Peking opera, ink stone, ancient copper coins, snuff bottles, porcelains, and posters from the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.
Xi'an	Located at the eastern point of the Silk Road, is one of most historical cities in China and known for the terra cotta army. Objects worth purchasing include miniature replicas of terracotta soldiers, reprints of historically important stone steles (e.g.: the earliest evidence of Christianity coming into China), folk art of zodiac animals, etc..
Lhasa	The political and religious center of Tibet. This city would be the best place to purchase Tibetan Buddhist artifacts, such as statues, Thangka paintings, sutra streamers and incense holders. There are also artifacts from Nepal and India.

Students undertook preliminary research before departure, proposed a few options, investigated the history behind such options, and discussed with instructors a practical purchasing plan, including where to find the object, how to get connected with local people, how to negotiate, etc. The instructors, through group and individual discussions, emphasized that students should look for objects that could be built into their research projects. For example, students from a religion-focused group might want to purchase local deity statues, and those wanting to research the performing arts would look for indigenous musical instruments.

During study abroad, each student was given a budget of up to \$50 to spend on one artifact. Purchases were fulfilled via student-teacher co-researching of antique markets, interaction with local art collectors, and on-site small group field trips. Taking Beijing as an example, before arriving, instructors and students decided to go to Panjiayuan market, the largest antique market in Beijing in existence since the beginning of the 20th century (Liu, Cheng, & Wang, 2006). On the day reserved for independent study, students traveled to the market with the instructor and an American art collector specializing in Chinese album painting (who sojourned in Beijing from 2016–2017). The art collector introduced the students to the layout and featured offerings of the market, as well as specific cultural rules in dealing with the merchants. For example, students learned that if you begin to bargain with a Chinese merchant, you implicitly agree to purchase the item if the merchant agrees with your suggested price; walking away from a price you have bargained for would be considered rude. With his help, students searched for Buddhist and Cultural Revolution purchased objects related to their research topics. When they needed translation, course instructors and the on-site art collector served that function, but students handled object selection and bargaining on their own.

The objects purchased in student research projects roughly fell into four categories (Table 2). Some categories corresponded with the exhibit themes that art students later used to organize the spring exhibits.

Faculty Perspective: Dr. Xiaolin Duan on the Effect of Winter Study Abroad

As I was planning, this course project seemed to have the potential to enhance our study abroad goals in several ways. Firstly, objects could help preserve students' experiences in material and

tangible ways. Purchasing objects that would later constitute part of the permanent art collection of Elon University could enhance students' feelings of ownership and encourage students to articulate their gains in this course better. This is not only congruent with, but also contributes to, the University's mission of cultivating global citizens. Secondly, through the immersive experience in these local markets, students were able to interact and communicate effectively with people from another culture using appropriate cultural/linguistic strategies, which fulfilled one of our course goals. Finally, this task encouraged students to reflect and meditate on their research projects while abroad.

Table 2
The Range of Objects Purchased in Winter

Religious Objects	Tibetan prayer wheel
	Tibetan <i>thangka</i> *
	Incense burner
	Guanyin Bodhisattva statue
Political Propaganda Objects	Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) posters
	Bust statue of Mao Zedong
	Ceramic plate with Mao's portrait
	1960s propaganda woodblock prints
	USSR military medals
Objects for Everyday Life	Ancient coins
	Old compass
	Embroidery by the Naxi ethnic group
	Antique mahjong
	1970s–1980s folktale book
Objects Symbolizing the Elite Culture	Calligraphy of stone rubbings
	Decorated literati fan
	Clay teapot

* *Thangka* is a Tibetan Buddhist painting, usually depicts a deity, scene, or mandala in Buddhism.

Student Perspective: Spencer Wagner on the Study Abroad Experience

I knew three weeks in China was going to be a different experience. My object-based research around Buddhism would offer processes and knowledge both familiar and unfamiliar for this study abroad experience.

The influence of the religion could not be ignored in Lhasa, where both the Winter and Summer Palaces of the Dalai Lama are hosted. The extent of Tibetan people performing their prayers around the site caught me off guard. But I had something concrete to latch onto that I knew I needed to understand. My mission was, at first glance, simple: find an original *thangka* painting that honored the Buddhist tradition. After our tour through the Jokhang temple, I did just that, with quite a bit of help from Dr. Xiaolin Duan. I wanted to find something that was original, genuine and did what a *thangka* painting was supposed to do: tell a story about a Buddhist deity. I eventually found one, and it was certainly one of the most difficult instances of bargaining, one of the great unknown unknowns of this small adventure.

As stated, my knowledge of Buddhism was limited as I entered China. This object-based research was an excellent starting point for learning that. As I experienced the religion in the temples and explored for a genuine *thangka*, I learned some of the key structural differences between Buddhism and about certain deities in the process. The personal benefit comes up in every conversation I have about the experience of studying abroad and incorporating undergraduate research. I embarked on a

trip to learn about a nation, people, and religion that I had never questioned, had little interaction with, or allowed for myself to ever truly wonder about. It was personally rewarding to experience a nation and people I did not know, and a religion I did not understand, initially.

The immersive element of studying abroad made this research so different, and the object-based research in this global context added another dimension. It was something specific to know, understand, and seek out. It was a base point from which to explore the Buddhist religion, Tibet, and the myriad intricate points between the religion, the location, and the nation of China.

To be able to find the actual object and experience the whole of its existence (the temples, the people, the geographic location) cannot be understated in adding value, but what made this particular process unique was how central the object became in learning about Buddhism. It was both the beginning point and the end goal, a map on which the experience could be guided. The research was no longer the process of reading, writing, and analyzing in a sterile environment; the research was alive, immersive, and guided. The object-based model of researching while studying abroad contributes to personal and educational development in ways that conventional forms of research cannot.

Stage Two: The Spring Course

Students were exposed to varying methodologies of material culture research and discussed secondary scholarship about object-related topics. In the spring upper-level history class, students were given step-by-step instructions on how to conduct upper-level undergraduate research:

1) *Decide the object/topic.* The instructor invited winter study abroad students to introduce their objects to the spring students. After spring students chose an object, the instructor held the first individual conference with each student to brainstorm about possible approaches on how to investigate the selected object.

2) *Study the object, and examine scholarship.* Students participated in a one-hour research workshop which was held by with Ethan Moore, the director of the Elon Art Collection. During this time, students closely examined the object and the written documents that came with it. After collecting data from both the primary source (the object) and secondary sources, students moved to the third stage: outlining the paper and drafting their preliminary thesis statements.

3) *Research and write.* This step commenced with the second individual conference between the instructor and the student. During this meeting, the discussion focused on methodology, potential research topics, and how the argument could be unfolded. This step concluded with a highly structured assignment, in which students developed a detailed outline as a path to writing a focused, persuasive research paper/catalog. The assignment asked students to include an abstract, the introduction and research question, thesis statement, literature review, major points and subtopics along with supporting evidence, a conclusion, and a preliminary bibliography. Students consulted sample outlines, read each other's outlines for peer evaluation, and got feedback from the instructor. An end-of-semester anonymous survey on May 15th, 2017 using the method of in-person questionnaires indicated that students found this assignment helpful in facilitating the logical flow (75% of students), constructing a thesis (68% of students), organizing paragraphs (68% of students), and starting the project early in the semester (71% of students). The grading experience echoed these comments. The instructor noticed the final papers in this course had stronger theses and organizations than the midterm papers from the same course. Selected comments from students included: "Usually I do not write outlines, but I honestly found this assignment as a helpful tool to organize my paper;" "This assignment greatly helped me with my paper. It forced me to get ahead on my work, without this I would not have been able to get my library loan resources."

4) *Present the research.* Students presented their research to a wider audience, including in-class mini-conferences with multiple themed panels and a public exhibit. To help students conduct their research with a wider audience in mind, the writing prompt of the research project offered two different options students could choose between: writing a traditional research paper or designing an exhibit centering on the chosen object. Students choosing the latter option needed to find nine similar objects from online or published catalogs of other museum collections and decide on a theme to tie all the pieces together. This assignment was aimed at having students relate their research topics to the public audience; their projects thus needed to be both engaging and accessible.

Faculty Perspective: Dr. Xiaolin Duan on the Spring Research Project

This course was an experiment in conducting more in-depth undergraduate research based on a course. It presented challenges that conventional undergraduate research would not usually face, namely a large number of students (32) who had different degrees of preparation (as the class included both majors and non-majors, and had no prerequisites), and only one semester to complete a complex object-based research project. The class was designed to tackle these potential issues. The step-by-step instruction and the outline assignment was used to make sure that most of the students could stay on track and be familiar with what research required. Furthermore, two individual conferences were embedded into the syllabus to create space for one-on-one interaction and feedback. The focus on research of a real object was designed to inspire interest among students and to narrow down the topic to a scale that proved doable in a semester-long course.

Student Perspective: Katherine Moritz on Her Spring Research Project

One of the most beneficial assignments of the class was selecting an artifact to research and present on. I selected a *thangka* painting of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, purchased by another Elon student (Spencer Wagner). Through my research, I enjoyed learning and developing more interest in learning about Buddhist beliefs and customs. I developed my topic into a broader one: “The Power of the Color Red: Comparative Study of Buddhism in China and Japan,” which looks into the importance of red within the material and visual culture of Buddhism. In the middle of this semester, I applied and received the [Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society](#) Scholar Development Grant to continue this research. I later presented the preliminary result at the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum ([SURF](#)).

This research provides me with external and internal benefits. Externally, research is fundamental and beneficial to have as an undergraduate. I am an Art History major, and this research is the first significant stepping stone that allowed me to grow and develop my researching and writing skills. Furthermore, conducting research better prepared me for internships in museums. Internally, this research project in the spring course and the grant I received are great ways to challenge myself academically. Research allows me to develop my analytical, technological, and creative skills, which is beneficial for any career path. In addition to challenging myself, going abroad in fall 2017 and starting my research encouraged me to gain a more global perspective. Through this experience, I now have a strong appreciation for Buddhist traditions and for the countries that I visited while abroad.

Stage Three: The Planning and Undertaking of the Art Exhibit

After the students finished the major part of their research, CATL and the Elon Art Collection co-organized an on-campus art exhibit as a showcase for this project. Further, they partnered with Elon’s Center for Race, Ethnicity, & Diversity Education to publicize the opening reception as part of the Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month which brought it to an even wider audience. Such on-campus collaboration offered a larger platform for students’ research, including the spring

Art History students, who worked as curators for the exhibit, and the winter/spring students, who presented their research to the public.

The two students who took charge of curating the exhibition as part of their work with the art collection regrouped these objects into different themes that were shown in rotation. The first one, launched in April 2017, was titled “Propaganda in China,” and consisted of woodblock prints from the period of the Cultural Revolution, political posters, and other artifacts featuring Mao Zedong during the 1960’s–1970’s. The second one, with the theme “Sacred and Secular,” was launched in April 2018. The student curators designed the physical layout and introduced the panels for the exhibit.

In addition, the winter students who purchased the pieces and the spring students who researched them collaboratively wrote individual labels for different objects. In their labels, the winter students narrated why they bought the objects and the spring students contributed 2–3 sentences about the cultural significance of the objects. For example, the two student authors of this article wrote about the same object from two different perspectives, as shown in Figure 1. During the opening reception for this exhibit, representative history students and the curators shared their takeaway points from the project. Below the student researchers describe how their involvement in the art exhibit elicited new perspectives on their research, followed with perspectives from CATL and the Elon Art Collection.

Figure 1
Sample Student Label Writing

<p>Thangka</p> <p>Provenance: Tibet Period: Contemporary Collection/Accession No. : Elon Art Collection, 2017.001.003</p> <p>This <i>thangka</i> painting was purchased in Lhasa, Tibet, near the Bakuo Street outside the Jokhang Temple. <i>Thangka</i> paintings are used to depict important deities or masters in Buddhism and larger <i>thangkas</i> can include more details in the background to give the story and history of the individual illustrated. — Spencer Wagner</p> <p>This depiction of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas, is painted on a <i>thangka</i>, a Tibetan Buddhist painting on cotton, or silk appliqué, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, scene, or mandala. <i>Thangkas</i> of Avalokiteshvara are significantly used within Buddhist tradition because they are used as meditation tools to help bring one further down the path to enlightenment. — Katherine Moritz</p>

Student Perspective: Spencer Wagner on Sharing Research with a Public Audience
Completing the research to write the labels for the pieces added value for the Elon community at large that could receive exposure to these objects, in addition to my own experience of getting to share my perspective in one of these settings.

Student Perspective: Katherine Moritz on Sharing Research with a Public Audience
To be exposed to the assignment of writing a museum catalogue was extremely beneficial towards my major in Art History. Because I am interested in interning at museums over the summer, I wanted to exhibit the proper skills needed to be a successful intern. Furthermore, I applied for museum internships that focus on curating and exhibit preparation. Having an assignment that allowed me to develop my Art History writing skills will provide me a good foundation to work as a museum curator.

CATL's Perspective: Sharing Research with a Public Audience

The former CATL program coordinator, Sarah Williams, helped coordinate logistics and communication about the art exhibit and opening event:

“So often research can be limited to a smaller audience of those who read the article or attend the poster presentation. The added public element of this research being presented in the opening event and available in CATL’s lobby for students, staff, faculty, and visitors to view gave it an interactive quality that I regularly witnessed with people stopping to read the labels and discuss the pieces. The students literally brought study abroad back to campus and the art students brought it to a wider portion of campus by presenting the pieces in such an engaging way. This model could be used to engage more of a campus, enhance campus art collections, and provide more experiential learning for both the study abroad and research experience.”

Elon Art Collection's Perspective: Sharing Research with a Public Audience

University Art Collection Coordinator, Ethan Moore, described his learning goals for projects involving student curators as threefold:

“First, I hope that the objects being displayed are presented in a manner that is authentic and meaningful—that they are staged in such a way to be true and respectful to the original functionality as well as the cultural designs and desires of the creators.

Second, the students must communicate a larger purpose or design throughout the exhibition. It is not enough to simply place objects in a fashion that “looks nice,” it is imperative that thought is given to the conveyance of meaning that is revealed through the spatial organization of the pieces.

Finally, the exhibition should be readily understood by the viewer and the information imparted should be factual. The audience must be able to recognize easily why objects are included and how they relate to a broader concept.”

Moore confirmed that the student curators met these goals for the exhibit because they selected objects and then “skillfully juxtaposed them to clearly articulate their vision.” He further noted two primary differences between this and other installations. First, the student curators integrated “what Dr. Duan’s students had written about the pieces when creating label copy.” The second difference Moore highlighted was that

“Working with pieces chosen by students during study abroad added an interesting element to the project as the objects included a myriad of different aesthetics. Up until now, most of the ethnographic objects in our collections were acquired by just a handful of folks. Having so few donors means that their collections have a fairly consistent visual presentation or materiality. Here, with the winter term project, multiple individuals were collecting with a host of different ideas about what to include and with divergent thoughts about what is visually or intellectually engaging.”

Student Curator's Perspectives: Sharing Research with a Public Audience

Student curator, Lauren Fisher explained that she learned how to curate objects and works according to themes that were presented to students who recently traveled abroad. “My co-curator and I learned how to organize the research material and objects we were given and coordinate a visually appealing display that communicated their cultural, historical, and societal worth in an educational light.”

When asked how the study abroad element made this exhibit different from other installations they had worked on, Fisher explained that it “added personal significance to each object from each student that chose it. This aspect is not common with other exhibits because other objects do not tend to come into the collection with added student stories.”

Fellow curator Lindsay Maldari echoed this as she described the impact of the study abroad layer on her work:

“The study abroad element absolutely enriched this exhibit from a Collections perspective in that we had objects at our disposal that would have otherwise been unavailable without Elon’s funding and dedication to truly engaged and fulfilled abroad experiences. We would love to see similar initiatives replicated in the future, not only to further enrich the students’ experiences, but also to better embody the Elon Collections’ dedication to international perspectives. Additionally, the Elon Collections are dedicated to presenting artifacts from distant cultures while properly contextualizing (rather than exoticizing) these objects, and the academic initiatives embodied by Professor Duan’s course fell perfectly in line with the Collections’ mission.”

Challenges and Considerations

Unavoidably, given the collaborative nature and curriculum-based requirements of this project, there were also significant challenges. Ensuring the effective undertaking of undergraduate research in study abroad course requires either more preparation time or fewer students. The former condition allows students to better prepare themselves and the latter ensures more collaboration and guided mentoring between teachers and students. The diverse backgrounds of study abroad students created challenges for an in-depth research project. The limited instruction time during the one-credit-hour study abroad pre-departure course (about 15 total contact hours) also hampered the full development of a research project for winter students. Given the limited time for orientation, specific prerequisites or more class instruction time would have been useful.

In addition, the timeline for the grant meant that most of the course readings, assignments, and travel for the winter study abroad course were already set before we knew it had been awarded. While the lack of background knowledge among students required more one-on-one instruction time during the study abroad, the pre-set curricular programs and intensive itinerary during the three weeks in China did not allow enough space for academic instruction specifically related to their projects. The timeline and limited instruction time for the winter study abroad course were the main factors preventing instructors from adopting a similar assignment the following year, when the class enrollment increased to 26.

The spring upper-level, writing-intensive class of 32 students also generated challenges concerning how to engage individual students and give more feedback. This model, therefore, might be more applicable to a senior seminar with smaller class size. We also identified several places for improvement, including adding an experiential learning element for the study abroad program and designing more one-on-one discussion time for the class-based undergraduate research.

This project was made possible through the CATL teaching and learning grant, but the undertaking of the three-stage project did not require a significant investment. Each student had a small budget to purchase inexpensive objects. The currency exchange rate enhanced the actual purchasing power. Students were also acutely aware of their budget and usually spent below their limit. When they found a good piece that exceeded their personal budget, there were two objects for which students “chipped in” to make the purchase. If budgets are limited, students could also be divided into smaller groups that purchase one artifact together.

Conclusion

This project shows that a collaborative model can effectively incorporate undergraduate research both inside and outside the classroom to bring the study abroad experience back to successive courses as well as to on-campus public audiences. Over the three-week study abroad experience, and the preparation before and presentation after, study abroad students gained confidence in a specific culture. Much of this confidence came from their connection with one object that they handpicked during in-field communication with people of a different culture. The task of object purchasing also helped students organize their research and exploration of an unfamiliar city, and after they came back, served as a memory anchor. For the spring semester students, as their feedback suggested, object-based research proved to be accessible and engaging. It helped exemplify the meaning of historical research about material culture. The in-class structured assignment was essential in facilitating their projects. In addition, planning for the outside classroom exhibit offered them a public platform to showcase their research results and pushed them to consider their audiences. Even students whose researched object was not on display for the first exhibition had a real audience in mind as they researched and wrote labels for their objects.

One positive outcome from this class-based undergraduate research was that students were inspired to further delve into the subject, carry on their research with material culture, and even advance their exploration via a future study abroad experience. One student who studied a string of traditional copper coins registered for the winter study abroad course the following year and continued her exploration of Chinese traditions. Katherine Moritz, after working on the *thangka*, became interested in the use of the color red in Buddhism and is currently furthering this research with independent research and an undergraduate research grant. She continued her collection of research data as part of the Semester at Sea study abroad program in fall 2017, when she arranged to visit Tibet and saw the Buddhist statue she researched.

The project demonstrated an alternative format of undergraduate research compared with more conventional ones. It drew from the study abroad experience and helped bring the immersed cultural engagement back to campus. Within a global context, the on-campus research projects took place in a regular class, but with outreach to the Art Collection and CATL. The objects selected and studied by students promoted the awareness and conversation on Asian civilization, and more broadly the global experience through study abroad, and brought a larger group of audiences to student research.

Scholars identify four criteria for undergraduate research, including an original intellectual contribution, and that it is selective, collaborative, and public (McNary-Zak & Peters, 2011). The undergraduate research discussed in this article fulfilled all four goals in a global context, and further enhanced this high-impact educational initiative. Both in-field cultural interaction and in-class research supported students' intellectual contributions. It prepared specific students with certain curiosity and capability to carry on their projects. The collaboration also expanded and became more intricate—including group research in the winter course, on-site interaction between instructors and students, partnerships between winter and spring students, and collaborations among different department/programs on campus. The last criterion, public, was also fully manifested in this project, as students engaged with people in a foreign culture and as they presented their research to the campus.

As seen from the above discussion, study abroad proved to be a chief factor in impacting students' critical thinking and research ability. The same winter and spring courses were offered in other semesters, without this collaborative research project. Although a detailed analysis of student work is not the focus of this conversation article, a preliminary comparison of student work and engagement in courses with and without the study abroad component suggests that the

undergraduate research project made students more engaged and productive. The participation and feedback from the winter students was more insightful regarding their interpretation of local culture (as compared to the winter course 2018). The final paper in the spring course also demonstrated a higher level of critical thought and analysis, as a result of more motivated discussion initiated by students both in and outside the classroom (as compared to other 300 level courses the instructor taught, including the same course offered in 2014).

The study abroad component enhanced students' engagement with undergraduate research from at least two perspectives. First, research has indicated that critical thinking is taught most efficiently in classrooms where students are actively involved, rather than passively listening (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004; Pintrich, 1998). Study abroad experience and the engagement with real objects promoted active involvement. Secondly, research indicates that if instructors vary the format of classroom instruction and assignments throughout the semester, they may succeed in helping students to develop a range of cognitive abilities (Sienkewicz, 2013). The component of study abroad in this project diversify the research formats in both the on-campus and off-campus courses. This allowed students to develop their critical thinking and presenting skills along different directions.

Compared to a more conventional type of undergraduate research, this project enriched the learning experience for our undergraduate students in a more hands-on and engaging manner. Even though this work is developed in the specific fields of history and art history, we believe that this model could also be beneficial for other fields.

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