

Assessment of Visual Arts Projects Produced by Library Student Employees

INTRODUCTION

The Curriculum Collection at Middle Tennessee State University's Walker Library is a partner to the university's College of Education through its holdings of K-12 teaching materials.

Three years ago, this library unit began displaying student employee-produced art work as a means of promoting the holdings of this specialized collection (Reed, 2017).

❖ **The art space:** a 7 ½ foot tall by 51 foot long glass wall, visible to many points of the library including the entrance atrium which opens up four stories to the top floor of the library.

❖ **The initial challenge:** recruit undergraduate students from the university's Art Education program to work in Curriculum and produce large-scale art displays for the glass wall. Displays must tie to Tennessee K-12 school standards and be both decorative as well as informative.

❖ **The current challenge:** formalize this program with the use of a student portfolio assessment in order to guide student planning, design, and implementation of the art displays.

LITERATURE REVIEW

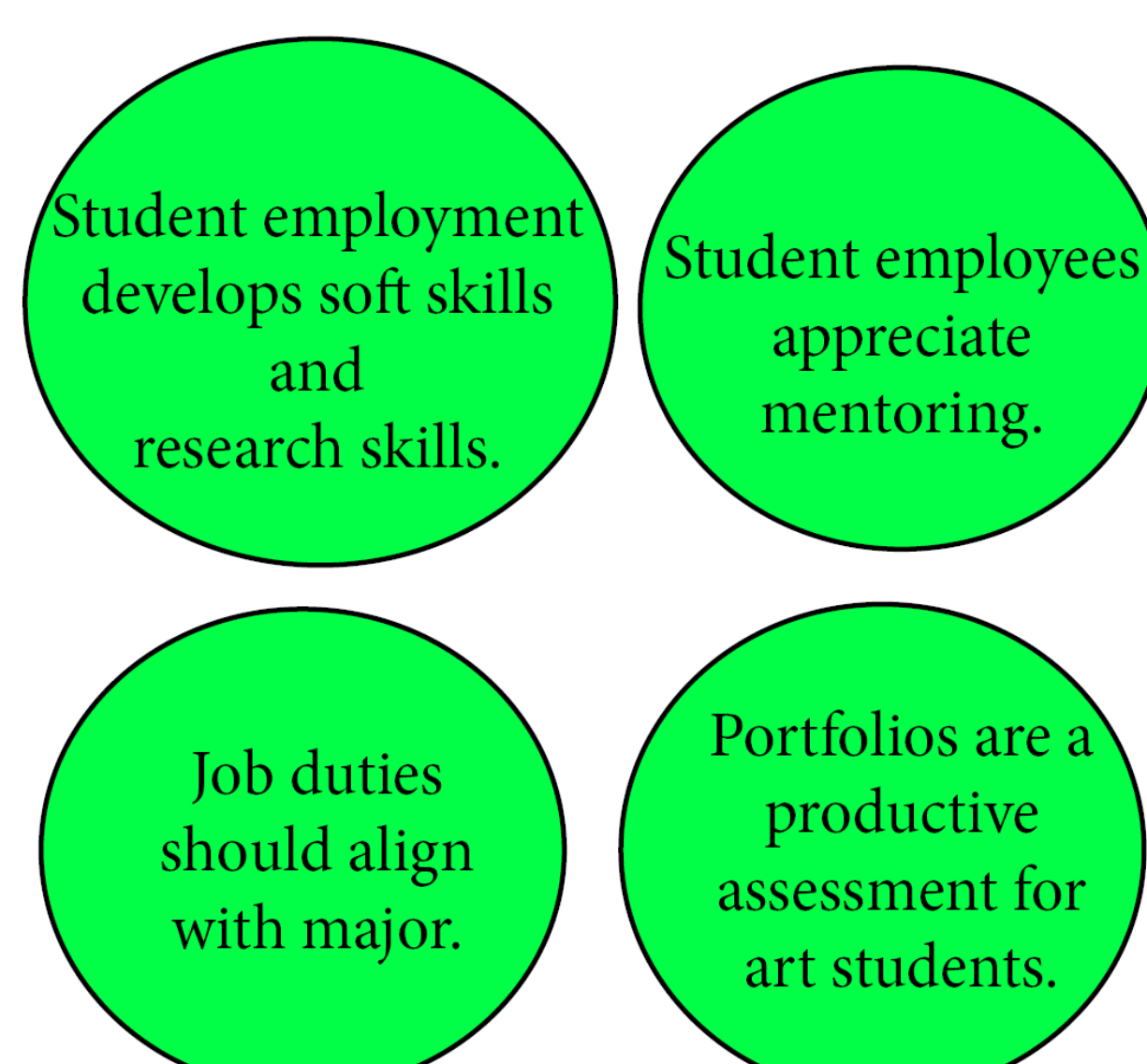
Undergraduate student employment has been linked to the cultivation of "soft skills" such as the ability to organize, communicate, and display interpersonal behavior in the workplace. Research also demonstrates increases in research skills as a result of student employment (Adeogun 2016; Benjamin & McDevitt, 2018).

Melilli, Mitola & Hunsaker (2016) described a structured professional development program for library student employees which increased their academic skills and professionalism. Students appreciated the mentoring environment created by the program.

Geel & Backes-Gellner (2012) found that in order to provide the most benefit post-graduation (in terms of future wages and job-search duration), student job duties must closely align with their field of study.

Therefore, an artist-in-residence mentorship program in which students can practice the skills developed through their Art Education major seems to be a mutually beneficial program. The trick, however, is in providing the proper structure and support for these student employees. How does a library supervisor with no art training communicate expectations and guide student work?

Portfolio assessments have long been used to provide formative assessment in the area of art education: they are particularly useful as a means of stimulating student self-reflection and growth (Davis-Soylu, Pepler & Hickey, 2011). Stokrocki (2005) made recommendations for everyday assessment in the K-12 classroom which have applications to portfolio assessment.



THE PROBLEM... AND THE SOLUTION

Background:

The Curriculum Collection's artists-in-residence are tasked with creating large-scale art displays with a connection to Tennessee K-12 instructional standards. In developing the displays, students need to be able to research the standards in order to create a corresponding theme of artwork. Students also need to be able to research our holdings in order to promote the collection through accompanying book displays.

Our problem:

How should art student employee work be assessed in order to (1) produce a satisfactory art display, and (2) provide a mentoring experience for the student?

Solution:

The use of a portfolio assessment is an established practice in the field of art education. The portfolio promotes collaboration and dialogue between the library supervisor and art student, such that an iterative process of student self-reflection and development can occur. With clear guidelines and minimal feedback from the supervisor, students are encouraged to take ownership of their work and put the skills of their coursework into practice.

Stokrocki (2005) gave suggestions for everyday assessment, and many of these steps were incorporated in the production of our "art mural project planner" document, which doubles as our portfolio assessment document.

Our portfolio assessment is currently a 5 page long planning document which emphasizes the pre-design steps needed. Specific questions prompt student self-reflection pre- and post- completion.

Components of our portfolio assessment:

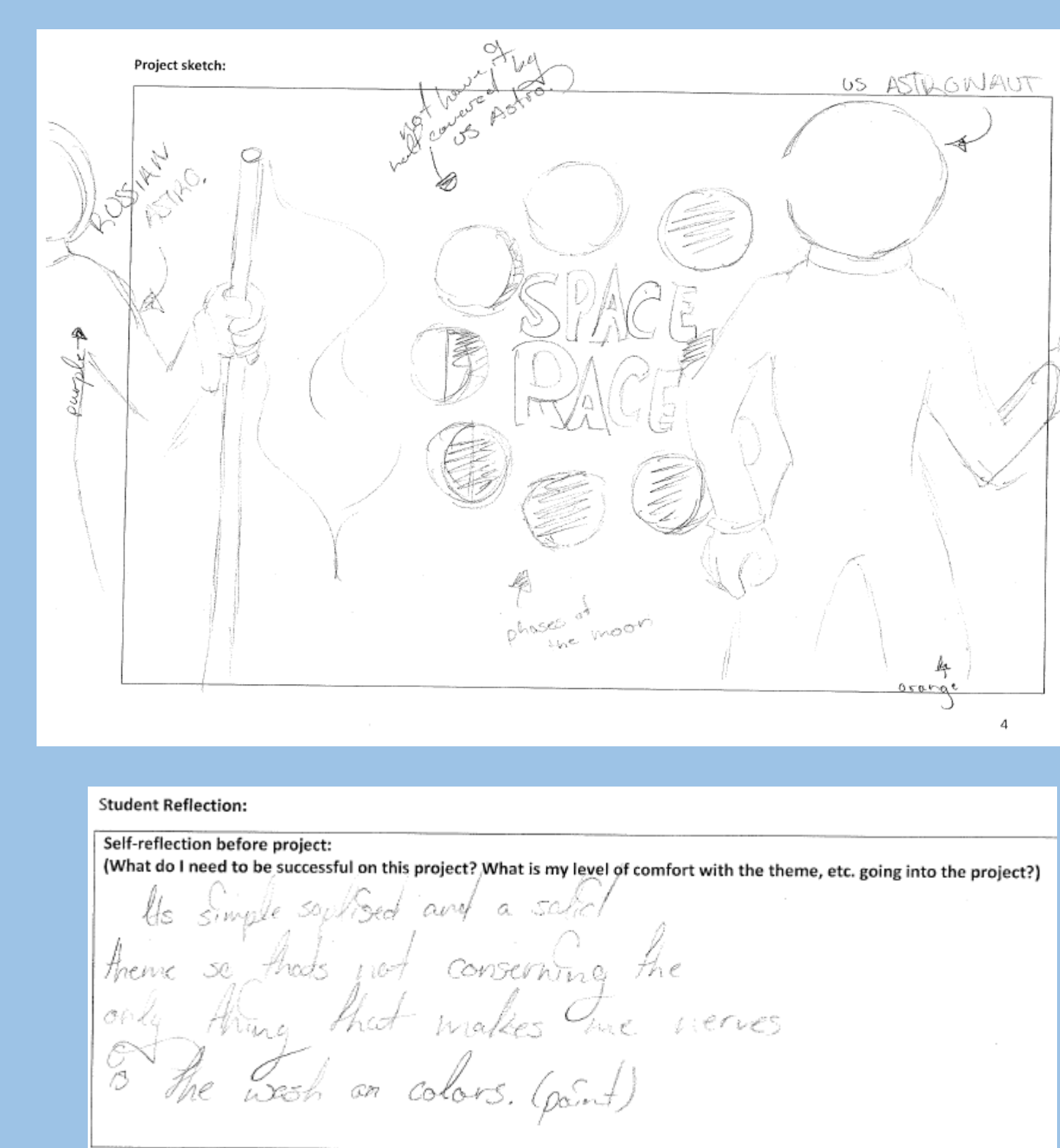
Theme	Description of accompanying signage
K-12 standards addressed	Timeline of completion
Tie-in's to other library departments or resources	Project sketch (full page)
Ancillary programming (corresponding book displays)	Self-reflection before project
Materials needed for art display production	Self-reflection upon project completion

EMERGING RESULTS

The portfolio is helping our current student artist with her planning skills as she designs a space-themed display. The project has also strengthened her library research skills, as she has utilized library resources for her planning as well as an accompanying book display. The biggest improvement has been an increase in communication between the library supervisor and the student artist.



A favorite past art display: includes art work as well as K-12 state standards explanation.



Examples from our current student's planning document.

CONCLUSIONS

❖ Mentoring library student employees takes time, but is rewarding for all involved.

❖ The use of the portfolio assessment has improved the quality of the mentorship: it has dramatically aided communication, particularly in the conveyance of goals and expectations. It has helped formalize the design process yet make it an opportunity for student self-reflection and growth.

❖ For future success, the program needs greater collaboration with the Art Education department in order to select additional qualified students for employment with the Curriculum Collection. The program has thus far relied on word-of-mouth for student referrals. The program would also like Art Education department feedback in order to improve the student experience.

IMPLICATIONS

❖ Student development through librarian mentorship and instruction is an important consideration in library student employment.

❖ Use of a portfolio assessment is a recommended step in providing a productive library mentorship experience.

❖ When possible, it is best to tie job duties to the skills being cultivated through the student's major coursework.

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