

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

10

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## Excerpts from Art Department's letter

Dear APSA Committee:

As we approach a time of transition in Guilford's leadership, we need to carefully consider what we deem important as a community. The members of the art department want to share our views with the people entrusted with making decisions about this college now and in the future.

Interested faculty and staff from the art department met on Oct. 7, 2013, not to hold a gripe session, but to build solidarity in our program and share ideas about productively moving forward in ways that allow our voices to be heard. During our meeting we recognized the difficulty of the task put before the APSA Committee and want to acknowledge your sustained efforts to respond conscientiously to the committee's charge and your diligent work to make difficult but concrete recommendations.

It is our belief, though, that some of these recommendations should be revisited.

While many of the recommendations in the APSA report impact the arts community, we strongly advocate reconsideration of the recommendation to close the Guilford College Art Gallery. From our perspective, the qualitative impact of the gallery, its vitality and connection to the art program, and its importance to the Guilford community are clear and vital.

One recommendation from our constituency relates to collection of qualitative in addition to quantitative data. From the comments at the open community forum, it seems like many people across campus shared the concern that additional qualitative research was needed. According to survey expert Michaela Mora, "qualitative research is by definition exploratory, and it is used to when we don't know what to expect, to define the problem or develop an approach to the problem ... Quantitative research is conclusive in its purpose as it tries to quantify the problem and understand how prevalent it is by looking for projectable results to a larger population." Qualitative research, though more time consuming, requires direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis or direct interaction with individuals in a group setting. Certainly our colleagues in the social sciences could supply a thorough methodology regarding the collection of qualitative data, but we feel that this aspect of the report was lacking. For example, to our knowledge, no one in the art department was asked to comment on the impact of the gallery on our teaching.

Without the Art Gallery, students who do not take a class in the art department would likely never encounter art directly. It will become more difficult for individuals and for the general campus population to have this kind of experience if the gallery is closed. Direct, experiential learning from artworks in art classes would only be able to happen when we take students off campus. Due to the increased investment of time, such off-campus trips might even become more difficult to take in the future. Therefore, this resource is one that we would like to see protected.

Lest we start down the slippery slope of thinking that interaction with the art collection and its programs is extraneous, studies from the past decade have shown the importance of fine art in education. On behalf of the Katy, Texas, Independent School District, Bob Bryant collected data to emphasize both academic and non-academic benefits from studying the arts:

Sufficient data exists to overwhelmingly support the belief that study and participation in the fine arts is a key component in improving learning throughout all academic areas. Evidence of its effectiveness in reducing student dropout, raising student attendance, developing better team players, fostering a love for learning, improving greater student dignity, enhancing student creativity, and producing a more prepared citizen for the workplace for tomorrow can be found documented in studies held in many varied settings, from school campuses, to corporate America.... The fine arts also provide learners with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, creativity, improved emotional expression, as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity."

In addition, it should be noted that art classes use the Gallery each and every semester (we have 173 students this semester alone). It was also mentioned that Terry intentionally appeals to multiple departments for each exhibition and each program, as evidenced by the current exhibition of contemporary Inuit art which has engaged classes from Sociology/Anthropology, Economics, Religious Studies, and History in addition to Art. Behind the scenes, there are additional artworks in the library that art students have been able to hold and experience tactilely.

When times get tough, art is often cut first because it is seen as extraneous or nonessential. It all depends on the kind of existence you want to have. Guilford's core values suggest that we value communication across boundaries of homogeneity and seek diversity to foster an ethical dimension of knowledge. An institution of higher learning can, of course, exist without art. However, art provides a heart to this institution: it is a source of communication, motivation, learning, skills preparation, and, yes, job-preparedness training. If the core values, in fact, do matter, it is important to take note when we are promoting inequality by setting a hierarchy of value. Instead of taking more programs away, we should be figuring out ways to add educational opportunity.

During our discussion, Assistant Professor Mark Dixon pointed out that the "culture that promotes standardized tests contributes to a factory, mass-produced society. We do not live in that time. Today collaboration and critical thinking are crucial." The way that we try to teach art at Guilford contributes to a wider approach to existing in the world and these initiatives go hand in hand with the Art Gallery. Closing the gallery would undoubtedly not only reduce our visibility within and outside the college, it would tarnish it. Along with the Bonner Center, the CRRC, Friends Center, multi-cultural education and CPPS, the Art Gallery should be promoted as a real point of difference for this institution so that our graduates will have an advantage. Upon reading about the budget cuts suggested by the APSA report, art alumna Katie Maloney '12 said, "Those are all the things that made me feel like I got a good education."

What do you need to hear from us to prove that the Art Gallery is a good thing? If you do not have that information, let us know what it is. We feel certain we can gather it and welcome the opportunity to do so. As far as recommendations for alternatives, perhaps instead of seeking ways to divide our institution into ways that seem "expendable," we should be looking for ways to preserve the lifeblood of our institution.

View the rest of this letter online at:  
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