

AAD 630: Analysis of Two

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### Analysis of Two Masters Projects in Arts Administration

The purpose of this paper is to find and analyze two Masters projects/theses/capstones completed as part of the degree requirement for Arts Administration (AAD) at the University of Oregon. As a student studying both Arts Management and Folklore, finding a way to bridge these two disciplines (and departments) is a key consideration. I came into the Arts Administration program with a Museum Studies concentration, and although I am still pursuing the Museum Studies certificate, my research interests step beyond that field. Arts Administration Managing Director, Tina Rinaldi, once said that doing research is like walking through a forest. Each research idea is a tree, and it is difficult to pick just one of them when so many are around you. But at some point, you need to choose a tree to latch onto and stick with it, no matter how good the other trees look. Choosing a topic has been arduous, because I want to do research on so many things, from theoretical topics and constructs to face-to-face emergent fieldwork. There are ways to combine these interests, but not under a feasible timeframe for a Masters research project.

I decided to look at my research interests and find places where they intersected. Feminist studies, constructs of value and authenticity and questions around why they matter and how they are constructed, and displacement are the three loose themes I have “narrowed” down my interests to. Finding these key words in AAD Masters projects was my strategy for choosing which alumni projects to analyze. How do arts organizations construct or use previously constructed ideas of value to benefit their causes? How do people interact with the place created by art organizations, whether digital or physical? Authenticity, like value, is crafted and fluid, and can be molded. Why these things are important and how they are used are questions I would like to incorporate into my own research. The two Masters research projects I chose are a little

disparate, but each speaks to possibilities for my own research. I will be analyzing “Value by design: Cultivating demand for the arts in Washington State” by Amanda Wold Sipher, a 2012 AAD graduate, and “Gathering Places as Cultural Passages: Engaging with Public and Community Arts” by Yasmin Arlette Guadalupe Acosta Gutierrez Myers, a 2011 AAD graduate.

**“Value by design: Cultivating demand for the arts in Washington State”**

**by Amanda Wold Sipher**

Sipher has a very clear research question. It is even framed with the proper, easy to find punctuation. She writes, “Known primarily for supply-side support of arts organizations, how can WSAC [Washington State Arts Commission] position itself to cultivate demand for the arts through its programs and services? Addressing this question is the focus of this study” (Sipher, 2010, p. 3). Sipher pulls economics into the discussion of value and the arts, referencing the growing field of cultural economics. Her structure is very forthright, and she consistently uses the word “lens” to convey and define the theoretical and conceptual frameworks her research aligns with. Her lenses include, primarily, cultural economics and Moore’s public policy paradigm. She describes her own created conceptual framework as overlapping spheres, where factors within each lens contribute to a dynamic relationship between social, economic, and political pressures.

Concerning data collection techniques, Sipher took a mixed methods approach. She did ethnographic field interviews with executive directors, observed public meetings, and used the anthropological method of participant observation to collect relevant data. As her work involved interviewing people, Sipher did the required IRB paperwork and process to receive human subjects compliance approval. But her data collection techniques were not limited to the

qualitative information she was getting via field work. Sipher also did an intensive literature review to familiarize herself with “the historical context of public funding in Washington, and also utilize nonreactive research methods such as content analysis of policy documents and existing statistics research” (Sipher, 2012, p. 13). More specifically, Sipher’s techniques included: collective case study of two state-level organizations, literature review of books, journals and websites, and content analysis of public policy documents and statistics (Sipher, 2010, p. 15). Along with the data she collected via qualitative research, Sipher also amassed field work like notes digital recordings. As part of her data-handling techniques, she mentioned that she would destroy non-public information twelve months after the completion of her project.

Sipher’s findings lead to the desire for further clarification and research. This is likely not unusual. She used an interpretivist/constructivist methodological paradigm, from which she attempted to interpret her findings. Her exact findings were not overly clear to me. Her research calls for a “growth of professional networks among members of Washington’s arts sector” as a way to “communicate key messages regarding the value of the arts to elected officials” (Sipher, 2010, p. 58). While an improved network for advocating for the value of the arts and arts sectors would be valuable, I found myself coming back to the question of: Who cares? Her conclusion seemed obvious for all the research and work that she did. There was no real discussion of value as a constructed idea that could be played with, which is what I was hoping to find.

**“Gathering Places as Cultural Passages: Engaging with Public and Community  
Arts” by Yasmin Arlette Guadalupe Acosta Gutierrez Myers**

Myers did not have a research question so much as a research statement, or a statement of purpose. Her Masters work was a Research Capstone, bolstered by specifically chosen

coursework and extensive research. She clearly defines her research goal in the first sentence of her capstone, saying “The purpose of this study is to explore key strategies that involve and attract community members to be empowered and enact change in their communities, as well as to examine how gathering spaces can become sustainable cultural and social assets in engaging communities” (Myers, 2011, p. xi). Although she asks a few questions relating to this statement of purpose, her paper was driven less by individual questions and more by the larger idea put forth in her statement of purpose. Her methods, too, were clearly defined. She plunged into a deep literature review in several subjects, including: cultural geography, environment, placemaking, culture, cultural development, community, the arts, and education (Myers. 2011, p xii).

Organizational framework was influenced by “how sense of place relates to the study of gathering places” (Myers, 2011, p. xiii) and looked at the conceptual ideas of Sense of Place, Civic Engagement and Participatory Democracy, and Models of Engagement. Data was overwhelmingly qualitative, pulled primarily from literature reviews and coursework. Myers also pulled from her own personal experience and related to her interest in establishing her own relationship to a sense of place. Myers found the opportunity for creating a dialogue, examples for why engaging with community arts and public art matters, and how placemaking played into larger issues of cultural heritage and participatory democracy.

I enjoyed Myers’ Research Capstone, finding her discussion points influenced by a mingling of theory from a sociological or cultural standpoint as well as an overview of activities, programs, and the attempts of others to establish a sense of place. Of the two Masters projects, Myers’ is more likely to be of future use concerning my own research aspirations. This research analysis did make me realize, however, that I have a few research biases of my own. I prefer

fieldwork to literature reviews; I am more persuaded by research with a theoretical background in sociology and anthropology. Perhaps this is because my own background is more closely tied with these disciplines, but the understanding of my own biases is a valuable insight.

References

Myers, Y. A. G. A . G. (2011). *Gathering Places as Cultural Passages: Engaging with Public and Community Arts*. Master's capstone. University of Oregon, OR.

Sipher, A. W. (2010). *Value by design: Cultivating demand for the arts in Washington State*. Master's project. University of Oregon, OR.