



UNC

Center for Urban Education

Leadership Council Chronicle

December 2021



Art Appreciation Students at the Kirkland Museum of Fine Arts

Thinking about Becoming a Teacher?

We are enrolling new students for the spring 2021 semester through the end of December.

Call Dr. Rosanne Fulton, Director, UNC Center for Urban Education, at 303-637-4334 or [email](#) her for more information.

Watch our [short video](#) to learn more about the CUE teacher-preparation program.

[Watch Video](#)

How to Make Art Make Sense

When Walt Kisner earned a master's degree in education, his professors focused on teaching him how to think rather than what to think. And that's the approach he takes in his Art Appreciation class at [UNC Center for Urban Education](#) (CUE). Most of the teacher candidates have little formal exposure to art, so Kisner breaks it down into two parts—understanding and experience.

"At the end of the class, I want them to feel confident in their opinion about any piece of art, because they can back it up. They have new knowledge of art techniques and history, plus they can rely on their felt experience from getting involved in the creative process themselves," said Kisner.

I want students to feel confident in their opinion about any piece of art.

Start with Care and Respect

Kisner used to start each semester by quoting Albert Einstein: "Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."

But when he saw the CUE students' level of involvement and commitment, he added something else to that formula: persistence and perseverance. Kisner had three children and worked part time while going to school full time to earn his undergraduate degree; he knows hard work when he sees it and respects the students' ability to overcome obstacles.

Kisner has plenty of empathy when it comes to struggling through the creative process as well. He worked as a professional painter for decades, earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Carnegie-Mellon University College of Fine Arts, and went on to earn a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Texas.

Later, he earned a second master's degree—this one in education—to bolster his many decades of teaching experience. Kisner's education, skills, and experience allow him to masterfully guide his students with patience and care.

Walt is inviting and encouraging; he has helped to tease out my inner artist.

Student Paul Lang can attest to that fact. "Walt is inviting and encouraging; he has helped to tease out my inner artist. He does not judge harshly and always wants to understand my perspective," said Lang.



CUE student Paul Lang



Guest speaker Peter Hamilton (left) showing the class pieces from his African art collection; Kisner is second from the left

Tie the Past to the Present

Kisner helps students with the "understanding" part of art by tying the past to the present. This semester, for example, Denver resident and art collector Paul Hamilton spoke to the class about his collection of traditional African sculpture and the effect it had on Picasso and other artists.

"Art in the past affects art that's being created now—even in the most extreme cases," Kisner said. He brings the point home by showing them examples in person. This semester, the class took field trips to the RedLine Contemporary Art Center, a cathedral in downtown Denver, and the Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art.

Student Shayla Staton agrees that the class has led her to a new level of understanding. "I see art in a totally different light now," said Staton. "Our field trips to museums and my art journal project exposed me to beautiful art throughout the city I would never have known about."

I see art in a totally different light now.



CUE student Shayla Staton

Let Them Dig In

Kisner facilitates the "experience" part of art appreciation by having students complete several art projects themselves. One of those projects—creating a cubist, Picasso-like bust of themselves—has several stages and takes the entire semester.

The very first project is creating a collage that describes themselves using images from magazines. They don't use numbers or words, only pictures. "For students who don't consider themselves 'artistic,' they immediately see they can create something new and unique from the work of others," said Kisner. "And they're beginning to wrestle with problems that all visual artists deal with."

They immediately see they can create something new and unique from the work of others.



CUE Student Sarah Goldberg

It's the end of the semester, and Lang has achieved Professor Kisner's ultimate goal: confidence in his ability to judge art. Lang said, "The course has shown me how to look at a piece of art not as just a 'cool' sculpture or painting. I can now look at works and see how the artist creates perspective and uses shading, line work, and brush stroke to create beautiful pieces."

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"Once they don't fear art but relate to it, they can use it as a tool with their own students," said Kisner. One of Kisner's current students works with mentally and emotionally challenged students in her role

as a paraprofessional; she reported that when other methods of communication had failed, she and her students "talked" through art. If she created a drawing, she would have them color it in. Or she would ask them to make a small picture to explain their feelings. "I saw their drawings," said Kisner, "and felt we all had done some important work through the medium of art this term."

To see some of Kisner's art, visit his [website](#). Read [this article](#) to learn more about Paul Hamilton's collection.

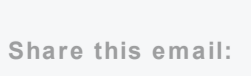
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