Student Performance Q&A:

2013 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2013 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Herb Weaver of Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Ga. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Exam Overview

In the AP Studio Art Exam, students attempt to earn college credit and possibly advanced placement in college classes by completing a portfolio of high-quality artwork. The student selects which portfolio to submit: 2-D Design, 3-D Design, or Drawing. These correspond to foundation courses commonly found in a college curriculum. The entire Studio Art Exam is a free-response question, but it is divided into parts that allow the AP Exam Readers to focus on a particular aspect of art making and assess the student's relative ability in each area.

Composition of the Portfolios

Section I: Quality. For the 2-D Design and Drawing Portfolios, students submitted five actual works that demonstrated mastery of design or drawing. For the 3-D Design Portfolio, 10 digital images of five works (two views of each) were submitted.

Section II: Concentration. Students submitted 12 digital images of works describing an in-depth exploration of a particular artistic concern.

Section III: Breadth. In this portion of the portfolios, students submitted a variety of works demonstrating an understanding of the principles of drawing or the relevant aspects of design. In particular, 12 digital images of 12 different works for 2-D Design or Drawing, or 16 digital images of eight different works (two views of each) for 3-D Design, were required.

Scoring Standards and Criteria

Two to three different Readers using a 6-point scale scored each *section* of the portfolios, which typically means that seven Readers score the entire portfolio. The scores assigned for each section (Quality, Concentration, and Breadth) are equally weighted. Each section counts for one-third of a student's final score, which is then converted into the AP Exam score. This system gives a balanced look at the student's work and provides an accurate assessment of his or her overall performance in art.

The cut-points that divide each score point are set by the Chief Reader to correspond with grades the work would be likely to receive in a college foundation class (AP 5 = A and so on). Colleges use the AP score to help decide if a new student is ready to test out of some foundation requirements or if the student has done well enough to earn college credit in art. It is advisable for students who wish to earn credit or test out of a requirement to bring their portfolios with them when they come to college. Often college faculty will withhold judgment about a student's readiness until they view the actual work in the portfolio.

The scoring guidelines are criteria that the Readers use as guides in assigning scores to the work. The guidelines evolve from year to year, based on the experience of the Chief Reader and Table Leaders, but they are not changed during the actual AP Reading. Current scoring guidelines can be found at AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.org).

Portfolio Assessment — 2013

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality**
  No portfolio can match the growth of submissions for the 2-D Design Portfolio in both numbers and quality of work. Although a significant amount of the portfolios in 2-D Design submissions was design-based photography and digital work, the submissions continue to be creative as well as inventive because of the variety of media approaches. The Quality section remained very strong this year and suggests a deeper understanding of the overall portfolio requirements.

- **2-D Design Concentration**
  The definition of a concentration has evolved to a new point of clarity. The higher scores reflect a trend that suggests stronger artwork in this portfolio section; credit must be given to the workshop presenters and high school teachers who are providing an illuminated explanation of what a concentration involves.

- **2-D Design Breadth**
  Continued improvement in the Breadth section was noted in 2013 because of an increase in active engagement with a broad range of design issues. Some students still had a penchant to focus on works that featured a variety of media instead of breadth in design issues; the best work demonstrated successful solutions to a variety of design concerns.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality**
  The 3-D Design portfolio represents a relatively small percentage (8%) of the combined number of AP Studio Art submissions. That fact is troubling in some ways but the overall quality of the work in the 3-D Design portfolio continues to show some improvement every year. Again, there was an increase in the use of found objects and other inexpensive materials being introduced and implemented into the creative process. The "second view" or detail image could be better employed to indicate the true nature of the work.

- **3-D Design Concentration**
  The 3-D Concentrations as a whole were comparable to those submitted in previous years. As is the case in the 2-D and Drawing sections, the 3-D Concentration could improve dramatically if a genuine series of thoughtful works were woven within a meaningful theme instead of selecting and submitting works that seem to go together.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

  3-D Breadth scored the lowest of all exam sections. The key to successful completion of 3-D Breadth is to focus more on defining relationships between surface and form to express design issues. More than in the other portfolios, it can be difficult to create the necessary volume of artwork in the classroom, and at the end of the year students are likely scrambling to find enough work to submit for the portfolio. Implement a series of summer assignments in 3-D to address this obstacle.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

  Although the Drawing Exam is not experiencing the same growth as the 2-D Exam, the consistency of work in the Drawing Portfolio remains strong, albeit somewhat conservative in approach. I suspect that, teachers seem to grasp the Drawing concepts most effectively and do a good job in teaching this portfolio to their students. The Drawing portfolio consistently scores the highest yet seems the least creative and the least likely area where students might experience risk-taking. It appears that every student knows what a "good" drawing is, and therefore that notion becomes the goal. Students should consider transferring their superior technical skills in drawing and develop a keener sense of investigation and inventiveness.

- **Drawing Concentration**

  As stated previously, the Concentration section requires a great deal of planning and students would benefit most if an extraordinary amount of time were dedicated to development of a plan of action at the beginning of this endeavor. The Concentration section encourages students to work out a cohesive body of artwork in a theme-based rationale. Each year definitions of a "concentration" improve, and this year was no exception as an increasing number of students were able to grasp the true intention of a "theme" quite effectively.

- **Drawing Breadth**

  Proper selection of artworks for this particular portfolio is the cornerstone of success in the Breadth section. The evidence exists that the artwork students submit in the Quality and Concentration sections is exceptional, but for some reason those art pieces are not always actualized in the chosen twelve.

Final Thoughts

I stand firm in my belief that AP Studio Art students are the best prepared to enter the college ranks. Not only in the "ways of art" but in other disciplines as well. Students who successfully complete an AP Studio Art program have also gained a deeper understanding of the discipline, planning, organizational skills, and ability to multi-task that it takes to succeed in the college environment. Simply stated, Advanced Placement Studio Art students give me hope for the future.

I am most appreciative of the dedication and commitment of high school teachers. This sentiment continues while working as an AP Consultant giving workshops throughout the year. I am continually humbled by the knowledge, wit, and enthusiasm exhibited by the Studio Art high school teacher colleagues. Again, one of the topics that surfaces from time to time is the amount of artwork required for each portfolio. Some suggest that less required artwork would translate into better quality artwork. Although there is merit in that argument, I strongly encourage teachers to hold firm. More than anything, when adjusting to study habits in college, students draw on the time-management skills they honed in AP classes.

Nothing keeps me more "alive" in the classroom than seeing the creation of awesome artwork from students. It may be just one student, a few students, or the whole class, but the energy that emanates from those successes is contagious. Consider using a variety of outside resources for teachers like the publication *Evaluating the AP® Portfolio in Studio Art*, which includes substantive comments by a former Chief Reader on student work that received a variety of scores. All sections of all portfolios are included in this full-color text, which is available at the College Board Store (store.collegeboard.com). In addition, there are many excellent articles by Studio Art teachers and links to other resources on the Studio Art Course Home Pages for 2-D Design, 3-D Design, and Drawing on AP Central. And finally, enroll in a Summer Institute or invite a consultant to your school for that added boost of enthusiasm.