
Reimagining the Art History Survey Course: A Chronological Approach for Global Inclusivity

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Abstract

This classroom exploration article focuses on a solution to the problem of traditional Western-focused art history survey courses limiting students' exposure to the art and architecture of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and Oceania. While most current art history survey courses claim a global focus, the Western focus is still present with the art and architecture of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and Oceania being given less than a third of the focus given to Western art. In order for these art history survey courses to be globally focused instead of Western-focused and offer a more inclusive perspective on art history, they need to be redesigned to possess a chronological design approach versus the traditional regional/chronological design approach. A chronological design approach allows for equal representation of art from different regions, fostering a more balanced and inclusive understanding of global art history. The redesign of ARH 101 Art from Prehistory Through Middle Ages for Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) occurred over the summer of 2024 with a launch in the Fall of 2024. The redesign of the course involved the use of the chronological design approach, a new Open Educational Resource (OER) textbook, *The Met Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (2023), to complement the new course design, and assignments that offer student choice and the need to analyze art from different periods and regions.

Keywords: Art history survey courses, chronological design approach, global inclusivity

Introduction

Traditional Western-focused art history survey courses limit students' exposure to the art and architecture of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and Oceania (Mast, 2019). The traditional Western-focused art history survey courses are typically split into two semesters: The first semester focuses on prehistoric through Middle Ages art and the second semester focuses on Renaissance through contemporary art. While most current art history survey courses claim a global focus, the Western focus is still present with the art and architecture of Africa,

Asia, Central and South America, and Oceania being given less than a third of the focus given to Western art (Yavelburg, 2014); additionally, art history instructors oftentimes continue the Western-focused tradition in their survey courses because they lack exposure to pedagogical theoretical advancements not taught in art history graduate courses (Yavelburg, 2014) and they exist within an academic educational space slow to change (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In order for these art history survey courses to be globally focused instead of Western-focused and offer a more inclusive perspective on art history

disruption is necessary (Mast, 2019). These survey courses need to be redesigned to possess a chronological design approach versus the traditional regional/chronological design approach. The chronological design approach gives equitable weight to the art and architecture of the world, while the regional/chronological design approach gives increased weight to Western regions and those regions considered to be predecessors of Western art and architecture, such as Egypt which receives more focus than the rest of the other African countries combined in the first-semester art history survey course (prehistoric through Middle Ages art) (Mast, 2019). Thus, a chronological design approach to art history survey courses can provide equal weight to the art and architecture of the world and enrich students' understanding of global art history.

Classroom Practice

The traditional Western-focused regional/chronological design approach of art history survey courses begins in Europe with prehistoric cave paintings, figurines, and dwelling sites and moves on to the path attributed to the evolution of Western art. This includes, in order, the Ancient Near East, Egypt, the Aegean, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Late Antiquity, and Byzantium. Then, Western Europe becomes the focus through the Medieval period, including the Romanesque and Gothic periods. Western Europe remains the focus from the Renaissance through the Neoclassical period (late 18th century) when the United States is also included. The focus on Western Europe and the United States continues through the contemporary day. The traditional Western-focused regional/chronological design approach can be traced back to the late nineteenth century and the organizing of art objects in a scientific manner by time period (Hart, 1982). Alongside this scientific grouping of art objects, the belief that the Classical ideal, harkening back to ancient Greece and Rome, was and is the pinnacle of artistic production that all artists should strive for cemented itself as the basis upon which art history survey courses were and many still are built (Elkins, 2002). This Western-centered focus

of art history survey courses was bolstered by European-heavy university art collections used during lectures (classes being brought to the collections themselves for instruction) (Kantor, 1993; Lavin 1993) and Kugler's (1842) *Handbook of Art History*, a seminal survey text that influenced art history survey textbooks throughout the twentieth century (Schwarzer, 1995). A shift away from these Western-focused art history survey foundations has been slow to come.

While recent years have brought increased inclusion of non-Western regions in these art history survey courses, the majority of the focus remains on Western regions and the path attributed to the evolution of Western art. This increased inclusion of non-Western regions has been somewhat reflected in the four standard art history survey texts: *Art History* (Stokstad), *Art through the Ages* (Gardner), *History of Art* (Janson), and *The Story of Art* (Gombrich) (Schwarzer, 1995). However, the new non-Western chapters are typically added sporadically within the Western-focused art narrative established by the original Western chapters giving the textbooks a disjointed organization. Moreover, these non-Western additions are often left out of the art history survey courses due to a lack of time and/or instructors' desire to stick with tradition (Elkins, 2002). This includes art history survey courses that the author has taught and will continue to teach for Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) (Broding, 2024a; Broding, 2024b). The course outlines are shown below:

ARH 101 Art from Prehistory Through Middle Ages Course Outline:

- Module 1: Course Introduction & Review of Art Principles
- Module 2: Prehistoric Art
- Module 3: Art of the Ancient Near East
- Module 4: Ancient Egypt
- Module 5: Art of the Aegean
- Module 6: Ancient Greece
- Module 7: Arts of Asia
- Module 8: Ancient Rome
- Module 9: Spring Break

- Module 10: Late Antiquity/Art of Byzantine
- Module 11: Islamic Art
- Module 12: Ancient America/African Art
- Module 13: Early Medieval Art in the West
- Module 14: Romanesque Art/Gothic Art
- Module 15: Final Project

ARH 102 Art From Renaissance to Modernism Course Outline:

- Module 1: Course Introduction & Review of Art Principles
- Module 2: 15th Century Art in Northern Europe
- Module 3: 15th Century Italian Art
- Module 4: High Renaissance & Mannerism
- Module 5: 16th Century Art in Northern Europe & Spain
- Module 7: Later Art in India, China, & Japan
- Module 8: Neoclassicism through the Mid-19th Century
- Module 9: Spring Break
- Module 10: Native Arts of Mesoamerica, South America, & Oceania
- Module 11: Later African Art
- Module 12: Early 20th Century Art
- Module 13: Later 20th Century Art
- Module 14: 21st Century Art
- Module 15: Final Project

The limitations of this revised approach include the marginalization of non-Western art and the reinforcement of a Eurocentric narrative. Such a limited scope fails to acknowledge the equally important art of non-Western regions unless it is seen as important to the influence of seminal Western art and art styles (Nelson, 1997). For example, the influence of Japanese woodblock prints on the art of the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists encompassed by the French term Japonisme (Ives, 2004). Another example of this is the influence of African tribal masks on Picasso's work, namely *Les Femmes d'Alger* (McCay, n.d.). Thus, students are exposed to

non-Western art from a very narrow perspective without the credibility and significance of such art being acknowledged in a way that would truly do it justice. Additionally, this narrow perspective of art fails to reflect the audience that makes up the enrollment of today's art history survey courses (Primm, 2018) alongside the increasingly global nature of education (Mast, 2019). Thus, a different approach to teaching art history survey courses is necessary to meet the needs of students.

The concept of nomadic education promises a route to breaking the mold of the traditional Western-focused regional/chronological design approach of art history survey courses. Nomadic education allows students to explore a subject in a fluid and meaningful way without the constraints of traditional boundaries (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Semetsky, 2008). Under the umbrella of nomadic education, art history survey instructors have moved away from a traditional Western focus by exploring local artistic practices through the lens of international ideas (Chandra et al., 2016), organizing the course around themes that address the nature of art and how it changes over time (Chandra et al., 2016), emphasizing the natural historical nature of art history (Camille et al., 1996), and focusing on the connections between art and space in a postcolonial world (Chandra et al., 2016). Another way to approach art history survey courses within the realm of nomadic education is a chronological design approach that allows for equal representation of art from different regions, fostering a more balanced and inclusive understanding of global art history. The chronological design approach aligns with EMCC's mission (EMCC, n.d.). The first half of the EMCC's mission is to provide "transformative and inclusive learning experiences that foster lifelong learning." The chronological design approach aligns directly with the "inclusive learning experiences" part of the mission.

Implementation

The redesign of ARH 101 Art from Prehistory Through Middle Ages for EMCC occurred over the summer of 2024 with a launch of Fall 2024; the redesigned course is currently running. The

redesign of the course involved the use of the chronological design approach, a new Open Educational Resource (OER) textbook, *The Met Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (2023), to complement the new course design, and assignments that offer student choice and the need to analyze art from different periods and regions. ARH 101's new chronological design approach resulted in a very different organization than what it looked like previously (Broding, 2024c). The course outline is shown below:

New ARH 101 Art from Prehistory Through Middle Ages Course Outline:

- Module 1: Introduction to the Course
- Module 2: 8000 to 2000 BCE
- Module 3: 2000 to 1000 BCE
- Module 4: 1000 BCE to 1 CE
- Module 5: 1 to 500 CE
- Module 6: 500 to 1000 CE
- Module 7: 1000 to 1400 CE
- Module 8: Culminating Assignment

The new outline strictly follows a timeline approach, whereas the old outline was based on region and chronology. The new outline modules are typically two to three weeks in length to allow for a deeper exploration of each time period, whereas the old outline modules were typically one week in length due to needing to fit in all of the topics (Broding, 2024c). The new outline allows for increased flexibility for both instructors and students. The new OER textbook is *The Met Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (2023). The organization of the course mirrors the organization of the OER timeline (Broding, 2024c). The assignments in the redesigned ARH 101 course offer students choice and the need to analyze art from different periods and regions. Students can choose one of several options for certain assignments. For the culminating assignment, the Virtual Museum Exhibit Assignment, students get to propose a theme of their choice that spans across time periods and regions, ensuring student autonomy and a wider lens for analyzing art than a more traditionally designed art history survey course.

Student feedback was collected during the Fall 2024 semester and used to guide course revision for the Spring 2025 semester. This

feedback was in the form of student emails to the instructor and focused on confusion with course assignment instructions, namely the Virtual Art Exhibit Assignment, which spanned the entire semester. Students who provided feedback were confused about the timeframe (8000 BCE to 1400 CE) required for the assignment and that they must choose a theme that spanned the globe with works of art representative of such used in their Virtual Art Exhibit Assignment. Based on this feedback, the instructions for this assignment, especially the first few deliverables, were revised for clarity, including examples to help guide students. The initial and ongoing redesign of this course serves as a Master Online Course for EMCC, meaning that if another instructor teaches the course online for the institution, the Master Online Course template will be used. The author is also planning to redesign the second art history survey course ARH 102 using the chronological design approach for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Conclusion

The chronological design approach to art history survey courses serves as a means to break away from traditional Western-focused art history survey courses that limit student interaction with global art and allow art history survey courses to reflect today's students, giving them flexibility and inclusion in the way they study and make meaningful connections with art. However, given the relatively new use of the chronological design approach to art history survey courses, reflection on the part of the instructor will be key to ensuring the success of this approach. Student feedback must continue to be considered in driving improvements to the chronological design approach. On a larger scale, other art history survey design approaches need to be studied and considered as part of the overall improvement of art history survey courses in general.

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