

**Skin Deep: Analyzing the Advantages Of Black Representation In the Teaching of Visual Arts**  
**Destiny Kearney, 2021**

My project is an interdisciplinary thesis that resuscitates how the teaching of Blackness in the art curriculum positively affects student engagement with race. It is interdisciplinary, falling under three different departments, Africana Studies, Art History, and Visual Arts. This thesis explores the potentiality of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in the teaching of studio art courses at Bowdoin College. In this project, I argue that at Bowdoin College, failure to provide Culturally Relevant Teaching in art studio courses dismisses the representation of Blackness in the Visual Arts Department. Incorporating pedagogies that explore cultural subjectivities allows for the reconstruction of the way that art is taught, prepares all artists to accurately represent all people, and better themselves as artists.

I spent this past summer exploring Bowdoin's Special Collections, The Bowdoin College Digital Catalogues, and reading novels about the history of Bowdoin. The historical component of my research is the foundation of this project because it provides a blueprint of where we were and where we are now. This will provide me with the tools to understand the trajectory of where we need to go as an institution. Since the chartering of Bowdoin College in 1794, the school has prided itself in its liberal arts and sciences. Although the teaching of art wasn't incorporated into the curriculum in the 1800's students were still exposed to art in the early architecture of the college and the collection of art left behind by James Bowdoin III. Bowdoin's first courses in Art History titled "*History of Art: Ancient and Mediaeval, and Renaissance and Modern Art*" were offered in 1912 by Professor Henry Johnson, and their first studio art course titled "*Principles of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture*" was offered in 1938-39 by Professor Phillip Beam. Interestingly enough, it wasn't until 1973-74 that an African and Afro-American Art course was offered for the first time. This happens to be only three years following the development of the Africana studies program. This brings to questions the motives of offering certain courses, were they just timely? How much expansion has occurred in course offerings relating to Art and Africana studies in both Art History and Visual Arts, if any?

While looking at the history of art at Bowdoin provided through *President Edwards Records* in Special Collections and the Digital Catalogues, I began to construct my own narrative that put into account the architecture on campus, classes taught in Art History and Visual Arts, Art that was displayed and collected, and the changes of demographics on campus. This narrative is crucial to understanding 21st-century perspectives of students and faculty within the Visual Arts Department at Bowdoin because it provides a foundation

. How students interact with art on campus and how they are taught the history or practice of art on campus influences them directly and indirectly. When students are constantly seeing Romanesque/ Gothic architecture, large portraits of the former white presidents, and learning how to reproduce these Greek sculptures, it becomes a consistent narrative that is white and eurocentric.

As a Black woman within the department, I've experienced frustrations because the methods of teaching were not always in my favor. We were drawing from white plaster statues, and most of my peers were white and had hair that could be achieved with a few strokes of a pencil. I cannot physically transform the demographics of the classroom, but it is imperative that when learning about portraiture, students are able to capture all types of people. Bowdoin's student body is filled with differences in hues, gender, race, and hair types, as is society. For an artist to have mastered only one type of person limits their skill set.

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