Minutes from IRC Meeting on Nov. 17, 2004

In attendance: Andy Ashton, Hunt Conard, Ruth Copans, Joanne Devine, Beth DuPont, Paul Dwyer, Bill Fox, Sarah Goodwin (chair), Jane Graves, David Hamilton, Katie Hauser, Mimi Hellman, Ann Henderson, Greg Howe, Mary Kathryn Jablonski, Robert Jones, Susan Kerr, Doretta Miller, Mary-Beth O'Brien (scribe), Tom O'Connell, Patrick O'Rourke, Steve Otrembiak, Mary Parliman, John Sanders, David Seiler, Peter Stake, Paul Sattler, Kris Szymborski, John Weber, Michael West, Pat Wright, Susan Zappen

Old Business:

The minutes of November 3, 2004 were distributed.

Tom O'Connell has agreed to stay on IRC in the Spring 2005 and will replace Judy Halstead who has been on sabbatical.

New Business:

The topic of the meeting was image-related technologies. Rob Linrothe, Art History, gave a demonstration to illustrate the difference in quality between slides and digital images. While there are many variables, the primary difference in quality can be attributed to the projectors. Projectors for slides provide better quality images, but Kodak is stopping production on these projectors, precipitating the move to digital images. In this transitiona1 period, the College will need to provide projectors for both slides and digital images.

There are four components to a successful transition: 1.) build a database 2.) access and manage the database 3.) projection system and 4.) classroom space.

1. Database:

There are currently about 125,000 mm slides in the Skidmore collection. The College will need to build a comparable database of digital images. It will need to manage this database and interface it with a delivery system.

2. Projectors.

The current projector system is not adequate to the task.

3. Classroom Space

The main art history classrooms are BO 382, Somers Room in Tang Museum, and Library 213. Currently and for a projected ten-year transitiona1 period, the College will need to offer both projector systems (for slides and digital). In Art History, image quality is essential.

The discussion moved to Re:discovery, Skidmore's web interface that functions as a proxy server to deliver digital images. Re:discovery has been in place for five years. It encompasses about 125,000 images. There are approximately 200 files for 8-10 courses per semester on

reserve. The College is currently scanning images from books using fair use principles and also using the products of licensed vendors.

One such vendor is Artstor, a collection of c. 300,000 digital images with more being added regularly. Its main focus initially has been to support Western art survey courses. However, specialized collections enhance the availability of images for advanced courses. The weaknesses in the collection are presently in the areas of contemporary, Mesoamerican, and African art. Artstor is also enhancing its collections to provide images for research in the natural sciences and anthropology. Problems with Artstor include a variable quality of images, low resolution download capability (400 pixels), and the need to use their proprietary software with somewhat limited flexibility and ease of use.

Regardless of the method of acquiring and delivering images, the College wants to assure that these images are reliable and of high quality. A discussion of copyright issues ensued. Works by twentieth-century and contemporary artists are more problematic and often difficult to find in standard vendors such as Artstor, which receives its images from art institutions. Password-protected systems may allow the College more flexibility.

The discussion returned to what Rob Linrothe considered Skidmore's weakest link: the projector system. He demonstrated two projectors in the room (Library 213). For the slides, one projector can be used for overall viewing and one for detail. This is an excellent tool to compare and contrast elements. The room, however, does not allow the instructor to use digital and slides simultaneously or to switch between them with ease. The slide resolution is significantly better (the example was stubble on a man's face was only visible through the slide projector and not through the digital projector).

A further complication is that most museums are no longer producing mm slides. They are now only providing digital images for sale on disk.

The discussion evolved to questions of whether good LCD monitors and more computers in the classroom would be a better solution. There are many variations between LCD monitors and they will have to be adjusted regularly.

With projectors one must consider the age of the bulb since there are color shifts with age. Another consideration is the screen. The Somers Room and Payne Room in the Tang Museum, for example, do not have screens.

The Studio Art department does not have a single general use classroom equipped with an overhead projector. Art 308 is scheduled to have a projector installed and will provide multi-use space. There are three studio art computer labs: the photo lab (15 computers), the graphic design lab (17 computers), and the animation lab.

Finally the group discussed a possible configuration for an art history classroom and debated whether it should have just student monitors linked to the instructor's computer, individual computers, or low-end workstations. The College is submitting a proposal for a Booth-Ferris Grant for classroom renovation and new technology.