

## Project Year

2015-2016

## Project Title

Teaching Mesopotamian Art through OERs

Completed project modules may be viewed here <https://cnx.org/> by searching for Marian Feldman

## Project Team

Marian Feldman, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences, Near Eastern Studies, Faculty

Megan Lewis, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences, Near Eastern Studies, Fellow

## Audience

The primary audience will be undergraduate students enrolled in AS.010.236 *Palaces, Temples and Tombs in Mesopotamia* in fall 2015. The enrollment for this course is estimated at 20-25. However, the project is intended to serve as a pilot for an extended project to include future courses that engage with Mesopotamian art at JHU and for teachers and students beyond the JHU community.

## Pedagogical Challenge

The arts of Mesopotamia – the “land between the rivers” in what is today Iraq and Syria – represent some of the earliest complex artworks dating back to 3500. Works from intricately carved seals to sculpture offer a wealth of arts that inform on the social, political, economic, and religious spheres of multiple ancient cultures, including Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria. The cultural heritage of Mesopotamia is particularly threatened at the moment due to the current political situation in Iraq and Syria.

Teaching this material at the undergraduate level, however, is a challenge as there is no reliable, up-to-date textbook available; the most recent useable textbook dates to 1954 (H. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*). The only general publication dedicated to Mesopotamian art, D. Collon’s *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (1995), is deemed by most scholars to be too erratic in its content to be used in undergraduate teaching.

## Solution

I propose to create on-line modules aimed at fulfilling the duties of a textbook to be used during the fall 2015 when I next teach AS.010.236. These modules will be designed as Open Education Resources using a pre-existing Internet platform, OpenStax CNX, hosted through Rice University, which promotes the production of small “knowledge chunks” in an open license venue. Materials for the modules will consist of freely available content and content created by me and the graduate student fellow.

OER modules of instruction permit multi-media and non-traditional formats for conveying information, including virtual reconstructions and walk-throughs, videos, and hyperlinking in addition to providing up-to-date informational entries for the ancient artworks. I envision these modules as a means of engaging students before actual face time in the classroom in order to concentrate on discussion and exploration of the complex conceptual aspects of Mesopotamian art and culture during class time.

## Assessment Strategy

I will use two assessment strategies during the fall semester: a formative one to assess the project in progress, and a summative one to assess after the end of the class. I anticipate working with CER staff in the development of both assessments. For the formative one, I would devise a mandatory survey that students could take through the Blackboard course website, the completion of which would be tied to either points for the class or withholding their grade. For the summative assessment, I would devise another mandatory survey to be completed after the end of class, and in addition, would have CER interview students as a focus-group at the end of the semester.

In addition to these more directed assessments, I will assign several short writing assignments over the course of the semester that ask students to engage with higher order concerns, such as culturally conditioned aspects of visuality, narrativity, or performativity. Performance on these assignments will allow me to assess how much further I am able to push student thinking and engagement beyond simple mastery of facts and data. I plan to write and deposit with CER a report on my qualitative assessment of how students performed in comparison with my past experiences teaching this material over the last 16 years.

## Faculty Proposal

Teaching Mesopotamian art at the undergraduate level is a challenge as there is no reliable, up-to-date textbook available; the most recent textbook dates to 1954. I teach a 200-level survey of Mesopotamian art (AS.010.236), a class I have taught regularly for the last 16 years. Currently I use a mix of articles by different scholars, which undergraduates find difficult because of the lack of consistency.

I propose to create on-line modules to fulfill the duties of a textbook during the fall 2015 when I next teach the course. These modules will be designed as Open Education Resources using a pre-existing Internet platform. In an exploratory meeting with CER staff, Mark Cyzyk (scholarly communication architect at MSEL) suggested OpenStax CNX, hosted through Rice University, which promotes the production of small “knowledge chunks” in an open license venue. After investigation of other possibilities such as Khan Academy and Saylor.org, OpenStax CNX appears to be the best fit for my project.

The creation of OER modules of instruction allows for multi-media and non-traditional formats for conveying information, including virtual reconstructions, walk-throughs, videos, and hyperlinking. I am aware of the issues surrounding the use of copyrighted materials and am engaged in discussions with Macie Hall (CER) and Don Juedes (Sheridan Libraries) to address these. The initial project may limit access to registered JHU students as one way to address copyright issues, although my intent is to use freely available content that is supplemented by content created as part of the project.

I envision the modules as a means of engaging students before actual face time in the classroom. I could thus concentrate my energies during class on exploration of the complex conceptual aspects of Mesopotamian art. My aim is to break out of the traditional lecture model of teaching, in order to stimulate the students to engage more actively with the materials. Such active learning has been challenging when teaching Mesopotamian art, because so much class time has had to be devoted to disseminating basic knowledge.

Megan Lewis (NES PhD student) will assist me, working 10 hours a week May-Dec. Her primary duties will be identifying already available material and creating new content. We both anticipate working

closely with CER as we move forward. Implementation and maintenance costs will be minimal by using pre-existing web applications and open access content.

The grant would fund this project as a pilot with the potential for future expansion. I propose to create 8-10 modules over the summer and early part of the fall, assess their merit in undergraduate teaching through my assessment strategies (see above), and then gauge the complexity of the project moving forward, for which I will seek future funding. If deemed feasible, I plan on future OER modules, which might be produced by me or by other scholars in the field in collaboration with me. I envision this project creating the foundation for an open-access, dynamic, on-line teaching tool for Mesopotamian art that could be accessed at diverse levels from introductory art history survey teaching to advanced undergraduate courses on the ancient Near East.