



Learning outside campus: academic support OFF-SITE, Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London

Robert Ping-Nan Chang
University of the Arts London, UK

Presentation abstract

Underpinned by the principles of ‘discovery learning’ (Bruner, 1961) and inspired by study trips/tours/visits in architectural education (Ewing, 2011), I included off-campus visits as part of my academic support provision from 2022. In September 2024, the Academic Support team at Camberwell College of Arts launched the OFF-SITE programme, offering visits to public spaces, museums, collections, archives, and architectural sites throughout the year, with the aims to allow cross-course student networking to happen, to orient students to London where they were studying and living, and to develop students’ awareness of art and design contexts and academic skills by using London as a resource.

In this presentation, I shared the experience of planning, promoting, and implementing the programme with a focus on my visits to places such as Barbican Centre, Victoria and Albert Museum, King’s Cross redevelopment, and Canada Water Masterplan. I also reported on students’ participation in and feedback from these trips.

The value of OFF-SITE was multifaceted. These visits were aligned with art and design education, allowing students to reflect in meaningful contexts and develop their critical thinking and research skills in places showcasing creative practice. It has thus provided “curriculum-adjacent” spaces for exploring, planning and reflecting’ (Maxwell and McVitty, 2024), enhancing students’ learning development and engagement with creative scenes in London. These events have also contributed to ‘community-building’, one benefit of teaching outside classroom (Clarke, 2022), through cross-course student communication and networking observed in the trips.

Through the implementation of OFF-SITE, valuable insights and learning have been gained into the logistical and pedagogical considerations of off-campus learning initiatives.

The success of the programme further demonstrated its potential to be replicated or tailored locally to enhance student experience.

Keywords: discovery learning, off-campus learning, art and design education.

Community response

Ugo Ejionye (Birkbeck, University of London) raised a practical question about post-visit engagement: once the sessions or visits were over, how was what happened captured, beyond collecting student feedback? They reflected that, in order to sustain interest or encourage wider participation, it might be helpful to promote the work more actively – to ‘blow’ your trumpet a bit more. They asked how the visits were marketed and suggested that providing mini case studies, in addition to student responses, could be a useful way to demonstrate the impact/usefulness of such trips.

This feedback opens up a direction for wider reflection on how we demonstrate the impact of informal, off-campus learning. As Chang highlighted, the strength of this model lies in its ability to nurture students’ reflective, place-based learning in a way that connects them across courses and disciplines. But as with many forms of academic support, especially those happening outside a traditional classroom setting, the value can remain hidden unless made visible through storytelling, collaboration, and individual or shared outputs. Simple formats such as student photos with captions, group Padlets (collaborative projects), or informal follow-up conversations could offer meaningful ways to encourage further reflection and in-depth discussion on what happens during these visits and why it matters. Fundamentally, this talk and both the formal and informal community responses reminded us that there is value in being more vocal about academic support work, especially when it creates moments of connection, orientation and confidence for students new to both their subject and their city. As the programme evolves, capturing and sharing these stories may be as important as planning the visits themselves.

Next steps and additional questions

One of the questions raised after the session was how the impact of OFF-SITE visits could be captured in what students 'did not mention' in their feedback. As Ugo Ejionye (Birkbeck, University of London) pointed out, showing others what happens during the trips – perhaps through mini case studies or informal reflections – might encourage more students and staff to get involved. In the presentation, Chang also reflected on ways to develop the programme further. One idea was to design visits for specific groups – such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners or students of a course or programme – to support community-building and a sense of belonging. There is also potential to co-facilitate visits with colleagues from academic support or English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which could help bring in new perspectives and make the sessions more collaborative. Such sessions can be further tailored for the target audience.

Some small but practical changes were also considered by Chang and participants during the discussion. For example, switching from printed handouts to simple digital resources could make walking tours more flexible and reduce printing. The use of tools like Padlet or Miro could also offer more ways for students to engage before, during, or after a visit.

There is interest in Chang's future directions, including trying out light-touch follow-up sessions: short on-campus activities where students can reflect, share ideas, or create something together based on their visit. Furthermore, students' testimonials in writing or an audio-video format and their photos and creative outputs during or after an OFF-SITE session will be collected and edited into a promotional video to showcase not only a snapshot of such trips but also potential benefits to students.

These reflections also raise a few open questions for both Chang and the community:

1. What are some simple/straightforward ways to show the value of these visits to others?
2. How can we better encourage students from different backgrounds and courses to take part?
3. How can a small follow-up activity help students get more from the experience?

Author's reflection

The OFF-SITE sessions enhanced accessibility of learning development as they may especially appeal to art and design students, many of whom are strong in visual and tactile learning. They also demonstrated the versatility of learning development provision, which is certainly not confined to the classroom setting. Like any on-campus teaching, an off-site event is guided by clear objectives and rationales. To implement one further requires consideration of various contextual factors, such as institutional regulations about taking students off campus (or even administrative hurdles), health and safety of the site or route, external stakeholders, and, most important of all, content to be seen or experienced. While all these were new to me back in 2022, which presented a learning curve, the iterations over the last few years have developed my skillset of planning, coordination and communication, and allowed me to curate a bank of activities, materials and itineraries which can be 're-used' with modifications in the future.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Ugo Ejionye from Birkbeck, University of London. The community response was edited by Buxi Duan, who captured the key themes of the community discussion, under the guidance of Laura Barnett.

The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

AI was used in the community response for grammar check. In line with our wider policy, other editorial processes did not use AI.

References

Bruner, J. S. (1961) 'The act of discovery', *Harvard Educational Review*, 31, pp.21-32.

Available at: <https://digitalauthorship.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/the-act-of-discovery-bruner.pdf> (Accessed: 7 January 2025).

Clarke, D. A. G. (2022) 'Bringing learning to life: nine tips for teaching in outdoor places and spaces', *Times Higher Education*, 4 February. Available at:

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/bringing-learning-life-nine-tips-teaching-outdoor-places-and-spaces> (Accessed: 7 January 2025).

Ewing, S. (2011) *The Value and place of site visits and field trips in architectural education*. University of Edinburgh Centre for Education in the Built Environment.

Available at: <https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/the-value-and-place-of-site-visits-and-field-trips-in-architectur> (Accessed: 7 January 2025).

Maxwell, R. and McVitty, D. (2024) 'Five aspirations for effective academic support systems' *Wonkhe*, 11 March. Available at: [https://wonkhe.com/blogs/five-](https://wonkhe.com/blogs/five-aspirations-for-effective-academic-support-systems)

[aspirations-for-effective-academic-support-systems](https://wonkhe.com/blogs/five-aspirations-for-effective-academic-support-systems) (Accessed: 7 January 2025).

Author details

Robert Ping-Nan Chang is a Senior Lecturer in Academic Support at Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London, where he primarily works with Design School students, especially those in the Interior and Spatial Design pathway, MA Designer Maker and MA Global Collaborative Design Practice.

Licence

©2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits

unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).