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UNC GREENSBORO

**NEW ART-FOCUSED STUDENT
GROUP BUILDS CONNECTIONS**

By: Dana Broadus

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CoWam members at UNCG's Weatherspoon Art Museum

A university needs an art museum. But what does an art museum need? A strong community of art-interested people to enjoy it, including students.

CoWAM, an interdisciplinary student group based at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, is designing programming that encourages UNCG students to strengthen and enhance their contributions to the arts, particularly through interactions with the museum.

The club will engage with the arts, and sustain a community of care with their peers, as a path for student connection and collaboration. They'll also support participation in cross-disciplinary programming at WAM through fostering students' professional, educational, and social growth, regardless of academic major or experience.

The monthly meetings, which began this fall, are open to UNCG students at every level. The club's group leaders Laura Levin, Angelica Henry, and Catie Nagy have been hard at work. CoWAM's most recent event, hosted at the museum in September, gave students the opportunity to meet other members and browse the artwork in the outdoor sculpture garden.

The members work with faculty mentor Ann Grimaldi, Weatherspoon's Curator of Academic Programming and Head of Education. Grimaldi maintains a support system for the group while encouraging students to take the lead. She guides CoWAM leaders with any logistics related to planning and holding meetings at the museum, assists with budgeting and ordering for the group, and advises CoWAM group leaders on how their ideas for activities and programs with students can be feasibly created while abiding by Weatherspoon, UNCG, and public health protocols.

Laura Levin, Angelica Henry, Azaria Gadson, and Catie Nagy talk about CoWAM below:

What inspired the club CoWAM?

Levin: The idea of CoWAM began late fall of 2020. With students being especially isolated from each other and the University because of Covid, we wanted to create space for students to connect with their peers and museum resources. Spring term of 2021, I designed and facilitated a pilot program over Zoom with the support of museum staff. Participating students, including Caitie Nagy and Angelica Henry, were

eager to engage and expressed interest in expanding the program into a permanent group at UNCG.

What do you want the UNCG campus community to know about CoWAM?

Gadson: We want UNCG campus to know that CoWAM is about giving students the opportunity to interact with and volunteer their time to the arts and the inner workings of the Weatherspoon and UNCG student event programming.

Nagy: I want UNCG Campus to know that CoWAM is a group that is open to anyone regardless of major, or if you are an undergraduate or graduate student. We welcome everyone who is excited to learn more about art, and we can't wait to get more people involved.

Henry: CoWAM is an answer to making museum space more accessible. Art spaces can be really intimidating, for artists and non-artists alike. Creating a welcoming and warm environment within this space is truly critical for a progressive art world. Art museums are a key resource that seems to be overlooked more often than not.

Levin: We hope that UNCG campus will get to know CoWAM, both its members and programs, as a new way for everyone to engage with the arts on campus and in the community. Students can access resources at Weatherspoon as they grow academically and socially at UNCG. CoWAM is a way for students to contribute to the museum with their own thoughts and experience while discussing critical issues that will shape the future of the Weatherspoon, UNCG, and beyond.

How does CoWAM combine the ideas of UNCG and the Weatherspoon Art Museum?

Gadson: We are focused on being accessible and inclusive similar to WAM, by having an open structure and by establishing a welcoming safe space.

Nagy: CoWAM is about bringing like-minded students together by engaging in the Weatherspoon Art Museum. We are here to learn, ask questions, make friends, and talk about all things art and museum related!

Henry: We put a strong emphasis on the student voice, and this emphasis is reflective of Weatherspoon. I would argue that CoWAM is an embodiment, or perfect mixture of UNCG and Weatherspoon.

Levin: CoWAM activates both the Weatherspoon and UNCG using student perspectives and ideas through interdisciplinary engagement and programs. Our mission grows out of UNCG and the Weatherspoon's goals for shaping social and educational experiences that provide a platform for collaborative student agency and a community of care.

What would you like CoWAM's legacy to be?

Gadson: Making art inclusive to all creative practices, even amongst other disciplines like STEM.

Levin: I hope we can make an impact on how students engage with art on campus and in the community. CoWAM is a place for students to build relationships with each other and the museum to create experiences that will change the university, museum, and student life.

Henry: I hope that if anything, CoWAM members feel more comfortable in public art spaces and are able to begin their own art conversations. I am so pleased with the amount of interest and the genuine pleasure that CoWAM seems to bring to people. Ultimately, I'm happy that the CoWAM team and members were able to create a safe and comfortable space together.

What would you say to convince someone to look deeper into art?

Gadson: I would say that Albert Einstein and I learned the same math, and what we managed to do with it is nowhere near the same. Every artist at some point used a pencil, it's all about what was done with what they had, and their passion is what made the thing. So look for what made the work you're looking at different from anything else.

Levin: Art can inspire us all differently, but it also has the ability to connect us. It is okay not to like some art, but sitting with it and being open to hearing other people's thoughts and ideas can expand appreciation and understanding of a particular work and broader ideas in and beyond a particular definition of art.

Henry: I don't think I would ask someone to look deeper into art, if the viewer doesn't understand what is "profound" about a work it can feel exclusive. Instead, I would encourage someone to establish a personal connection to work. There is a certain richness, and an unmatched richness that comes with connecting to art. I would certainly share these words with whoever I wanted to convince.

What has been your favorite art exhibition at the Weatherspoon?

Gadson: My favorite exhibition was the Alison Saar exhibition. It was also the first exhibition I saw it at the Weatherspoon Art Museum my freshman year of college!

Levin: I also loved the Alison Saar exhibition. Her prints were absolutely stunning. “To The Hoop” and “Ties That Bind” were also inspirational to see and reflect upon.

Henry: I love “Art on Paper.” I especially enjoy that all of these works incorporated paper in some form – it created an equalizer that forced me to analyze these artworks in a different way.

Upcoming museum events for October 2021 include:

- Borough Coffee: Every Tue. – Fri., 9 a.m.- 3 p.m., Weatherspoon Courtyard
- Artist Talk with Angela Fraleigh: Thursday, Oct. 21, 7 p.m., virtual
- HNAC Café: Thursday, Oct. 28, 5:30 p.m.

Be sure to check the [Weatherspoon Art Museum](#) page for more information and events

Interview by Dana Broadus, University Communications

Photography by Martin W. Kane, University Communications

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