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Activities Attended and Value of Conference

Community College Humanities Association National Conference

October 12-14, 2023 – Austin Community College District, Austin, Texas

The Community College Humanities Association National Conference was an invaluable experience from a variety of perspectives, including professional development, colleague networking, and growth within the framework of interdisciplinary humanities work. My colleagues Michelle Iden (Dept of Art and Humanities), Samantha Gigliotti (Dept of Biology and Chemistry), John Soltes (Dept of Design and Media Studies), and I conducted a roundtable discussion entitled “Parks Program: Campfire Stories on Interdisciplinary Community Engagement” on the morning of Saturday October 14th, in the Conference Sessions Round 6. This experimental “campfire” roundtable focused on how the humanities can be engaging for students through interdisciplinary work. As facilitators, we each added a 3-5 minute segment of a “campfire story” on Parks Program, a program at the County College of Morris that utilizes a points system to encourage students to attend on and off-campus events. The program combines classroom experiences and community events to focus on conservation and protected lands from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

In addition to the central presentation which was the impetus of the conference travel, I attended many workshop, lecture, and roundtable sessions that provoked new interests in myriad scholarly endeavors. The several keynote/plenary talks were enlightening, and spotlighted interesting examples of the use and enrichment of the humanities at the community college level. The theme of this year’s conference gathering was “A Life Worth Living Together: Humanities as Collaboration.” The opening Thursday Keynote by Allison Wolfe and V. Marc Fort was titled “Today’s Music Scene,” and gave an illuminating look into using music and the other performing arts in an enriching humanities experience. The Friday Keynote “Diverse Representation in Film and Television” by Tery Lopez expanded on the speakers experience as the head of the Writers Guild of America West Inclusion and Equity Department, and spurred some interesting conversation about the evolving appearance of cultural representation in cinema and other visual arts. The Saturday Keynote was “The Classics are Always Relevant,” a very

applicable conversation led by Roosevelt Montas about how great books have the power to transform lives and to speak to people of all backgrounds.

My colleagues in the Parks Program arrived early to the conference in order to attend several official Pre-Conference Workshops. The first of these workshops entitled “Colorism in the Latinx Community” was facilitated by Cassandra Guadalupe-Venegas and provided an opportunity to engage in discourse as well as experiential activities around colorism, specifically in the Latinx community. Participants analyzed the role that colonization played in the establishment and perpetuation of this skin tone hierarchy in the Latinx experience. The other Pre-Conference Workshop, “Weaving Context with the Threads of History and Sculpture,” was led by Julia diLiberti. This interactive forum led participants to observe, comment, and engage in activities that can help students analyze art and writing more fully while noting the overlaps between history and sculpture. The workshop provided a method of using art and historical observations to establish artworks as documents to be “read.” It reinforced the reality that art doesn’t happen in a void of context and that history and art together preserve that context. This workshop will prove to be most important in the classes that I teach, namely Art History I and II, History of Design, and Contemporary Art.

The rest of the conference offered many workshop sessions that further discussed integral issues in using a humanities education at the community college level. I attended several meetings on a variety of topics during the first Friday Conference Sessions Rounds 1-3, including the panel on “Different Roles, Same Goal: Forging Collaboration within the Humanities and Beyond,” the paper session “Identity and Memory,” which included ‘To Change : People, Place, and Time’ by Jennifer Chenoweth, ‘Using Songs to Learn about Hispanic Cultures’ by Laura Cummins, and ‘Breaking Maat: Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, and the Battle for Egyptian Identity’ by Jason Whitmarsh, and the paper session “Visual and Cultural Literacy,” which included ‘A Culture Through the Eyes of the Underrepresented’ by Frank Masel, ‘In the Eye of the Beholder: Approaches to Visual Literacy across the Disciplines’ by Jon Luckstead, and ‘Modeling Social and Personal Responsibility in Teaching in the Humanities’ by Geoffrey Grimes. The Friday Conference Sessions Rounds 4-5 included the Gallery Talk “Art + Political Engagement: Exploring Art as a Tool for Political Dialogue” moderated by the Austin Community College

Gallery Coordinator Olivia Spiers, and the roundtable “Defining the Challenges of Inclusion: Connecting DEI and Academic Freedom at the Community College” moderated by Heather Harris. These two sessions continued my interest in advancing the cause of DEI at County College of Morris, which began when I attended this past year’s NAPE Summit in Washington DC.

The specific personal experiences and academic methodologies shared at CCHA 2023 are already influencing the way I look at teaching and learning. CCHA was a valuable experience, and useful in every iteration for my career at the County College of Morris. Thank you very much for your support in attending this conference.