

Mellon Evidence-Based Teaching and Learning Grant Proposal

Art/Music 336: From Mark to Sound, From Sound to Mark (Music, Drawing, and Architecture)

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1. Project Description: *Sobremesa*: Learning Through Professional Artistic Collaboration

- a. We propose to transform the classroom of our co-taught course “From Mark to Sound, From Sound to Mark” into an artistic collective, one that will work collaboratively with us on a professional public art project in the Grove Hall neighborhood of Boston this fall semester. This project is a continuation of Daniela Rivera’s commissioned large-scale outdoor sculpture *Sobremesa (Karaoke Politics)*, which opened to the public on September 8, 2019, and for which she was planning to collaborate with Jenny Olivia Johnson to create a sound component during the fall. To celebrate the project’s closing day on October 26, 2019, we have decided to work closely with our students to design and create a sound installation and live performance piece that will be site-specific on and adjacent to the *Sobremesa* sculpture. Through a series of classroom activities, discussions, and critiques, as well as through several site visits to the sculpture and visits with schoolchildren and people living in the Grove Hall community, our students will experience first-hand what is it like to be a part of a professional artistic enterprise, and what it means both aesthetically and logistically to execute a large-scale multi-media public artwork. We believe this experience will have tremendous pedagogical value for all of the students enrolled in the course.

- b. We aim to address the challenge of teaching students music and art in a setting that is usually far removed from the realities of the professional world—the college classroom—and to address the fact that visual art and music classes tend to be taught very separately. Many of the courses in both of our departments teach vital skills for art-making, such as painting, drawing, print-making, music theory, electronic music, and the histories of each discipline, and students do have many opportunities to showcase their work in galleries and recitals on Wellesley’s campus. However, very few of our current course offerings enable students to experience what it is actually like to conceive and execute a professional-level artwork beyond the college’s campus, let alone artwork that is fundamentally interdisciplinary in nature. Students with backgrounds primarily in visual art will have the opportunity to learn more about sound, and students with more extensive sound and music backgrounds will be able to engage more closely with visual materials. All students will be asked to think deeply and creatively about the connections of the visual and the sonic, and all of them will also be afforded the rare opportunity to grapple with logistical issues that rarely arise in a college classroom setting, but which professional media artists who do public work face every day—such as working with materials that can withstand numerous visitors and unpredictable weather, assessing power needs for electronic components, interfacing with city engineers and officials, and adhering to strict deadlines.

Additionally, our students will have the unique opportunity to work closely with members of the Grove Hall community as they design and execute this project, which will provide a rich context for thinking meaningfully about what it means to create site-specific artwork in a neighborhood with its own complex histories and challenges.

- c. We believe this experience will result in many important learning outcomes for our students, such as how to design, plan, and implement a large-scale public art commission involving both visual and sonic elements; how to work collaboratively as part of a large collective; how to think simultaneously about aesthetics and logistics at every stage of a project; how to think critically and effectively about the diverse audiences that are likely to visit a public art project such as this one; and how to design the experience of this kind of work such that the people inhabiting the community in which the artwork is being presented feel included and welcomed into the experience.

2. Research Evidence

Many recent scholarly articles and studies support the idea that student learning is greatly enhanced by integrative, interdisciplinary encounters, as well as real-world, hands-on, collaborative pedagogical experiences in professional settings. Some examples include:

- Bryant, L. H., Niewolny, K., Clark, S., & Watson, C. E. (2014). Complicated Spaces: Negotiating Collaborative Teaching and Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education. *Journal of Effective Teaching*, 14(2), 83-101.
- Carlisle, K. (2011). Arts education partnerships: Informing policy through the development of culture and creativity within a collaborative project approach. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 112(3), 144-148.
- Carlson, C. E. (2014). *Interdisciplinary Collaborative Performance: A Practical Investigation and Guide to Collaboration* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison).
- Klein, J. T. (2005). Integrative learning and interdisciplinary studies. *Peer Review*, 7(4), 8-10.
- Newell, W. H. (2010). Educating for a Complex World: Integrative Learning and Interdisciplinary Studies. *Liberal Education*, 96(4), 6-11.

3. Assessment

We plan to use several methods to assess the learning outcomes of this project for the students.

- 1) Before the final project is executed on October 26, we will give students an opportunity to work in small groups to come up with prototypes of ideas for the

installation, which we will then critique in class and use as inspiration for the final idea, on which we will all eventually collaborate.

- 2) After the big project is complete, we will use the following class meeting for an extensive in-class discussion about the process and its outcome, and we will then ask students to write a short reflective essay about their experience.
- 3) Finally, in early November, we will invite Javier Bustos, a major Argentinian media artist, come to our class to provide his feedback on the project, and to also design and run a workshop with the students about his own work and process, which we think will be enormously relevant to the kind of work we will have just completed together.

4. Course Information

This proposal is for Art/Music 336: From Mark to Sound, From Sound to Mark: Music, Drawing, and Architecture. This course has been taught one other time (Fall 2017), and we are teaching it again this semester (Fall 2019) with some alterations, most notably the innovative project outlined above. We currently have 21 students enrolled.

5. Availability

We are both fully available to devote ourselves to this project throughout this semester.