



COFAC Creates: Diversifying the Audience through Partnerships



College of Fine Arts & Communication
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point



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Mission

The COFAC Creates mission is to develop robust programming that brings together varied disciplines represented in the College of Fine Arts & Communication (COFAC) at the University Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP). Themes are developed that are inclusive and broad enough to attract multiple participants from the college, university, and community and provide students with the opportunity to use their expertise to create something wonderful together.

Vision

COFAC Creates will build a culture that is genuinely interested in cross-disciplinary work and will cultivate intellectually curious faculty, staff, and students who value the work of those outside spheres of personal interest.

Values

Intellectual curiosity, collaboration, shared purpose, and interdisciplinary study are valued. COFAC Creates allows for colleagues to share research and creative endeavors, to collaborate when those interests intersect, and to enjoy the efforts of others when those interests do not.

The Program

COFAC Creates is a student-centered program designed to provide a multi-disciplinary creative experience which brings as many stakeholders to the table as possible. Though not initially part of the concept, COFAC Creates has increased gallery and event attendance, increased the diversity of the audience, and created sustained programming partnerships. The College of Fine Arts & Communication at UWSP coordinates the program through an ad hoc committee comprised of interested staff members and students.

The annual committee composition varies based on the selected theme but has had some continuity of participation from the inception of the program. The annual theme is established through recommendations from the faculty and staff of the college with primary UWSP program venues including the Carlsten Art Gallery, Jenkins Theatre, and Michelsen Concert Hall. The program is being expanded to include the Scarabocchio Art Museum (SAM) which is operated as a partnership between UWSP and the City of Stevens Point. The SAM mission is, in part, to provide a setting for programs that enhance the cultural and intellectual growth of the community.



Rent Party, 2006

The program's beginning

When COFAC Creates was first proposed in the spring of 2006, the goal was to find a way for students in COFAC's various departments and its Division of Communication to collaborate on a project. The aim was to design an experience whereby students would bring particular skills and knowledge from within their respective majors to the process of learning how to do something new or to create something that they had never made before. As one of students involved in COFAC Creates put it, "If I had to describe COFAC Creates, it would be as follows: COFAC Creates is an opportunity to collaborate with young professionals on a unique and rewarding project." When Jenna Sprattler (Communication) recalls her experience, she strikes a similar chord: "The beauty was in the variety of backgrounds of all the students involved in the project. We were able to bring our different ideas together in a harmonious way and the product of our vision was amazing!"

Guest artists provide any additional expertise that is needed and faculty from the various departments collaborate with them to help the students. COFAC Creates culminates in an event where the new work is displayed to the college, university, and Central Wisconsin communities. The larger goal of COFAC Creates is to enhance an intra-college understanding of how all disciplines complement one another and to continue the happy task of conveying how talented the students are to the general public.

The first COFAC Creates focused on making silent movies on 35mm film using a vintage, hand-cranked movie camera. The class was offered in the fall of 2006 and, later, in the spring of 2007, students hosted a public screening featuring the four movies they had produced, projected by an antique film projector to the accompaniment of live music. During this inaugural COFAC Creates, students immersed themselves in the style of early cinema, circa 1905. They wrote scripts, built sets, made costumes, applied mustaches, and learned to dance the one-step (taught by Theatre & Dance emerita Susan Gingrasso). They acted in and directed three short narrative films and a set of vaudeville shorts.

Donald Sosin and Joanna Seaton, guest artists from the first COFAC Creates, took notice of the excellence of the students and the efficacy of the faculty and curriculum: "We were amazed at the quality of student talent, knowledge, and enthusiasm. The young filmmakers were totally engaged and serious about their work. We were delighted that they dedicated themselves so thoroughly to exploring—and recreating—the art of silent film. The costumes, the sets, the writing, the acting, and the use of cameras were all very impressive. It seemed that the students got an all-around educational experience."

Three visiting artists contributed to this initial effort. Dan Fuller, a lecturer in the Department of Art History and the Communication Arts Department at UW-Madison, provided the 1923 Universal Newsreel Camera and taught students how to use this quirky and idiosyncratic technology to shoot their films. In the spring, internationally-known silent film accompanists Donald Sosin and Joanna Seaton came to campus to work with musical composition students and to perform with the student-made films. They trained a UWSP student marimba player and the three musicians collaborated in the accompaniment of one of the films, *Rent Party*. In the fall of 2007, *Rent Party*



and *Cosmo's Magical Mints* were selected for screening at the Silent Film Festival (*Le Giornate del cinema muto*) held in Pordenone, Italy. An international audience numbering more than 2,000 applauded the work of COFAC students. It was a proud moment for the College.

When asked what he remembered about his experience with COFAC Creates Silent Films, Matthew Case (Communication) said, "I learned a lot. The hands-on experience and ability to play many roles on the team (camera, actor, set creation, directing) made this class so much fun, while being educational. I was able to use my personal abilities to the best of their potential; other students and I collaborated on projects in this class, we worked together: first to brainstorm, then to implement our plan using the specific gifts of each member of the class, and finally we found great friendships naturally grew from it all!" Joy Ratchman Grimes (Art & Design) realized that, "[she] took away a wonderful sense of camaraderie and accomplishment from the class. We learned a lot about the conventions of early silent films and how they were made, but we also used our own artistic talents in to recreate them. Everyone in this class was amazing."

In the fall of 2008, COFAC Creates produced an animated movie about Moroccan pirates stranded in New Foundland. Pat Miles, Department of Music, initiated this installment of the program. The specific goal was to reverse-engineer an animated film for a musical composition, *The Far Tortoogas*, composed by Washington, D.C. based musician Charlie Barnett. Again, the vehicle for making this film was a class comprising majors from each department in the college. Students were faced with a nearly insurmountable set of tasks: to learn how to do stop-motion animation with cut-paper silhouettes, to write a scenario precisely timed to Barnett's music, to build a multi-plane animation stand, to create the puppets and backgrounds for the film, and then to animate, shoot, title, and edit the 14 minute movie—all in two-and-a-half months—so that it was ready for a world premiere of *The*

Far Tortoogas with the composer in attendance in November. Students relished and rose to the challenge:

“This course allowed us to take our creativity to new heights and practice new skills ranging from stop motion, green screen, storytelling, working with actors, orchestras, and literally hours and hours of cutting out miniature sets no larger than a standard sheet of paper—all by hand.

“The absolute best part of this course, however, was the live production factor. We had a definite show to put on and it really held us accountable to hold up our end of the bargain so that the orchestra could accompany a live performance with the pirate video that we created.

“This experience added to my media production major in countless ways. I learned more in that semester course, from a hands-on experience, than I did from any other course that I took. We were always looking for ways to instill innovation into the work we were doing and we were so committed to the project at hand that we took it upon ourselves to become pros in what we were doing. I owe a lot to this class and it will be one of my most cherished memories of a college course for years to come.” (Jeremy Kraemer, Communication)

The students benefitted from a variety of expertise as they learned and accomplished their work. UWSP Art & Design alumna Molly Michel, also a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts, spent a day teaching the “pirates” the fundamentals of stop-motion animation. Stevens Point native and award-winning animator, Christine Ferriter, also generously gave her time to show more techniques of stop-motion. Novelist, poet, and Director of the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing at UW-Madison, Jesse Lee Kercheval, worked with students to select a story and to flesh it out. Shannon Reinbold-Gee, a professional cut-paper artist based in New York State, provided long-distance tutorials in silhouette cutting and helped design the puppets and settings. She also attended the performance and presented a community workshop on silhouette cutting.

Charlie Barnett encouraged students over the phone and was artist-in-residence working with the COFAC Creates students, Communication students, and Music students in November. When he thinks about his experience on *The Far Tortoogas* Barnett first remembers the students:

“Perhaps the most striking aspect of the project was the concentration and commitment with which they all pursued this project...It was very difficult work and they all seemed to be enjoying the team effort. The camaraderie among the kids was another aspect of this project that impressed me... It also existed in the orchestra. I have to think that there is a bonding effect that comes from working on an entirely original project. I think that everyone involved felt like they were doing ‘something important.’ To me, it was.”

The ideas Barnett expresses were echoed by student Adam Qutaishat (Music):

“I loved this project. It exposed me to connections and skills that I never thought would be connected to my field. It challenged me to develop new connections to music and develop my non-musical skills. The experience itself could

be once in a lifetime and something that I will enjoy sharing with my students in the future. Besides that, all the connections I made continue to help me to this day. While taking the class I was learning about composition and performance and this project took that and forced me to look at it in a completely different light. The thing that sticks in my mind is working with everyone in the class to create a unique work of art. The process and the product really stand out and will be things I carry with me forever.”

The performance in Michelsen Concert Hall on November 21 was called *Pirates!* The house was full and the audience included students, faculty, and community people of all ages, including many children barely able to stay in their seats as “pirates” roared down the hall’s aisles. In addition to screening the students’ movie to the live accompaniment and world premiere of *The Far Tortoogas*, the UWSP Orchestra played a selection of pieces, Lucinda Thayer and the Combined Men of the UWSP Choral Union and Concert Choir performed sea shanties, and Theatre & Dance student Amie Root trained an enthusiastic group of pirates to perform a sword fight on stage.

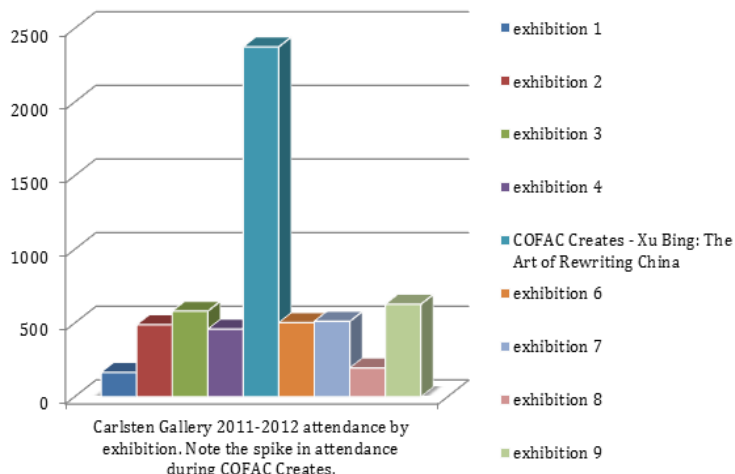
The Far Tortoogas also had a life beyond campus which functioned to introduce others to the talent and good work of COFAC’s students. It was selected for screening in two film festivals: The Central Wisconsin Film Festival (2008) and also the Magnolia Student Video Festival, Southern Arkansas University (2009).

These early emanations of COFAC Creates demonstrate a malleable framework with the tensile strength that makes it amenable to all sorts of ideas for ways the students and faculty in our college can collaborate, learn, teach, and create art. It is hard to imagine a topic or theme that couldn’t fit and wouldn’t work. For the students, faculty, and guest artists involved in the first two iterations of the program, the key take-aways were those we intended: students learned new techniques for artistic creation and they recognized the knowledge and skillsets of their peers. Visitors to campus and audiences far afield from UWSP realized that students from this university are imaginative, hard-working, and skillful. The unexpected benefit has been the abiding pride that students and guest artists have felt in the work they did and the goodwill and satisfaction they still report as a result of being involved in an intense creative process. Three of the visiting artists, Sosin, Seaton, and Barnett, have also returned to campus to work with students in Communication and Music.

Themes that have focused on cultural diversity

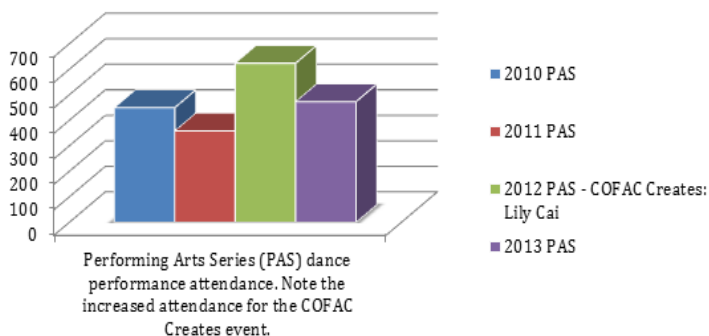
A general working premise is that the theme should include participation from the various programs of the college: Theatre & Dance, Art & Design, Music, Communication, and the Aber Suzuki Center. The venues should vary within each event to reach the maximum number of people. Diversity was an initial focus of the program but defined narrowly to mean variety (diversity) of student and staff research interests and creative endeavors. Cultural diversity becomes central as the themes dictate both in the presentation of cultural identity or history and in developing a diverse audience, i.e. an audience that varies not only ethnically and culturally, but in the level of creative understanding and ability.

Xu Bing: The Art of Rewriting China was a theme centered on an exhibition and series of events from February 2 through March 10 of 2012. The focal point was an exhibition of Xu Bing's work in the Edna Carlsten Gallery on campus. The program included a dance company, an opera company, a film series, visiting scholar lectures, visiting art critics, and opening and closing receptions. The aim of the program was to encourage exchange between East and West while facilitating dialogue on contemporary Chinese art and culture. The program offered experiential educational opportunities that gave participants the chance to gain further understanding and appreciation of contemporary Chinese art and culture.



Two components of this theme provided the opportunity to examine traditional and contemporary China. Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company combines ancient Chinese forms within the idiom of modern dance. The choreography becomes a visual dialogue about the intersection of culturally classic and contemporary motifs. Conversely, the Qi Shu Fang Peking Opera Company seeks to preserve the theatrical tradition of Peking Opera. As a follow-up to this COFAC Creates, the Carlsten Art Gallery presented an exhibition of Alan Govanar photographs, *Dual Lives: Chinese Opera in New York City*, featuring life-sized images of the Qi Shu Fang Peking Opera Company in costume and in street dress.

The Performing Arts Series regularly includes one dance performance as part of the season and dance attendance has been consistently high within the series. During the Xu Bing program, Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company was included in the Performing Arts Series. Even with established university and community support for dance performances, the added COFAC Creates dance event had impressive attendance.



Visiting scholars for the Xu Bing series included: Dr. Melissa Chiu, the Director of the Asia Society Museum, New York; Dr. Jason McGrath, Department of Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Minnesota; and Dr. Eugene Wang, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art, Department of East Asian Art History, Harvard University. The Chinese Film series included: *Hero*, *Beijing Bicycle*, and *Kung Fu Hustle*.

The most programmatically complex COFAC Creates programs have had a cultural connection to either China or Japan which has had a documented positive impact on attendance. With regards to exhibitions, the COFAC Creates themed exhibitions have roughly quadrupled the attendance over the average of other exhibitions during the particular exhibition season. In most cases, COFAC Creates has been funded internally through modest budget reallocation within the college and through campus partnerships. Not all COFAC Creates programs have a direct connection to culturally diverse populations represented on and off campus. In the instance when cultural diversity is central to the program, interested donors have been sought to help with the events. Effective philanthropy is the process of aligning donors with projects of interest to them. In looking to the Stevens Point community, tracking financial support provided to the university, college, and particular department or projects is possible through University Advancement. Following three particular donors with financial support that is predicated in part on a cultural connection, we find that the first has no giving history with the university beyond supporting one particular COFAC Creates theme. It is possible that the donor has never felt a connection to the university or has not seen relevance in the programming that the university offers. In this case, the COFAC Creates theme has built a temporary relationship with the donor. The second donor suspended giving to the university for two decades only to come back when presented with the opportunity to support a culturally rich COFAC Creates theme. Further tracking will be needed to measure the level of commitment from this particular donor. The third donor has a three-year giving history to the university with one general gift and several gifts targeted specifically to scholarships within the arts. After an investment in COFAC Creates, this donor has increased the level of giving to arts scholarships.

The unique element within *Xu Bing: The Art of Rewriting China* was that it was conceived and organized by a student, Ellen Larson. She approached the Carlsten Art Gallery director with a desire to specifically exhibit the work of a Chinese artist. They worked together to enlist an artist to show his or her work in the gallery and eventually the student invited Xu Bing to send work and to come from Beijing for a lecture, critique, and reception. Ellen was responsible for all correspondence with the artist's studio and was an integral member of the committee, planning the events and soliciting funding. She is pursuing an emphasis in art history, with a concentration on Modern and Contemporary Chinese art. As a result of this COFAC Creates, she has expressed an interest in museum work, with an emphasis in Chinese art.

Xu Bing: The Art of Rewriting China results include: greatly increased gallery attendance, an on-going interest in Chinese culture, and increased interest in projects and exhibitions that are in some way diverse. These include: *Spirits Present*, an exhibition by Paul Baker Prindle and Becky McDonah with

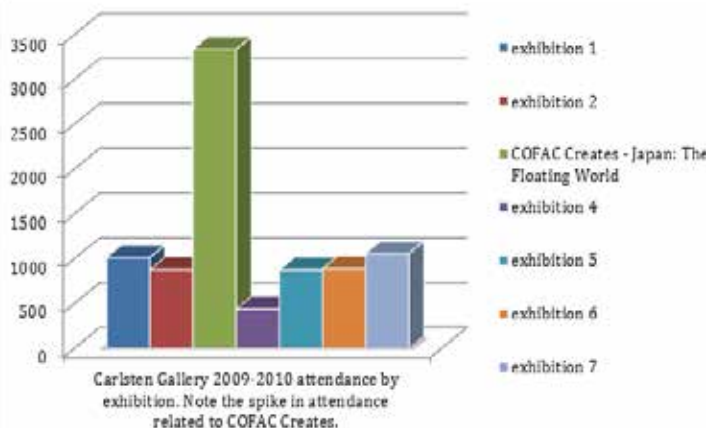
photographic prints that feature sites of murdered gay men; *Day of the Dead* installations each fall (in 2011-2012, this event had the second highest attendance in the Carlsten Art Gallery and was only surpassed by the Xu Bing exhibition); and the up-coming celebration of the 50th anniversary of the march on Birmingham, the Children's March.

Japan: *The Floating World*, October 25 through November 25 of 2009, began with a Department of Art & Design class trip to the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Wisconsin, to view their considerable Japanese print collection from which the Carlsten Art Gallery exhibition was curated. The exhibition receptions featured performances by students from the Aber Suzuki Center and a Japanese Martial Arts demonstration by a local martial arts center with demonstrators ranging from elementary school through university level students.

Lectures related to the theme included: *Printmakers in Edo*, Drew Stevens, Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photography at the Chazen Museum of Art; *Appraising Desire in Ukiyo-e: Representations of Courtesans in Late 18th Century Japan*, Dr. Julie Davis, University of Pennsylvania; *The Race to Erase: Reflections on a 'Post-Racial' Society*, Junichi Semitsu, University of San Diego Law School; *Persona Perspective: Prints by Yuji Hiratsuka*, Yuji Hiratsuka, Oregon State University; and *Admiring the Sunrise: Japanese Woodblock Prints as Seen by 19th Century Europeans*, Dr. Larry Ball, UWSP.

The related film series curated by Dr. Leslie Midkiff-DeBauche of UWSP included *Masaki Kobayashi*, *Double Suicide*, and *Ugetsu*. David Furmoto, Professor of Acting at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, gave a demonstration titled *The Path of the Onnagata: Male to Female, make-up for the Kabuki theatre*. He also gave a public workshop in Kabuki theatre.

Japan: The Floating World results include an increased



awareness of Japanese culture and increased awareness of the value of diversity. The gallery attendance spiked during the themed month as represented in the chart above. There was support from the local Asian community that included philanthropy, attendance, and committee service. It should be noted that the City of Stevens Point has an Asian population of 4.7% while Portage County has a corresponding population of 2.9% and the state of Wisconsin has a corresponding population of 2.3%. The White (non-Hispanic) population, using the United States Census Bureau terminology and statics, for Stevens Point is 90.1%, for Portage County is 92.4%, and for Wisconsin is 83.3% (by city).

Challenges for program expansion beyond the UWSP campus

Directions of Influence is the 2012-2013 theme for COFAC Creates and explores the connection between art and music, looking specifically at how one influences the other. On February 2, 2010, Jazz at Lincoln Center released a recording of Ted Nash's visual-art-inspired suite, *Portrait in Seven Shades*. Nash named the individual movements after seven masters of modern art: Chagall, Dali, Matisse, Monet, Picasso, Pollock, and Van Gogh. The writer Will Friedwald said, 'Music is like painting in time, painting is like music in space.' *Portrait in Seven Shades* illustrates this point masterfully.

With this theme in mind, the Scarabocchio Art Museum (SAM) presented three concerts at the museum. The series started with a concert of music from Gabriel Fauré and John Cage with accompanying computer-generated graphics. This was the first COFAC Creates event to be staged at SAM. Historically, other events have been presented on the UWSP campus or at the Theatre@1800, which is housed in the Sentry Insurance corporate headquarters. The second event, *(((clang)))*, was an interactive sound and sculpture installation featuring 3D sound design by Nathaniel Bartlett with kinetic sculptures by Andrée Valley. Bartlett followed this up with a concert at UWSP. The third event was a student recital by Cullen Sutherland and Dan Janik and featured music inspired by master paintings of influential artists.

The scheduling of university events poses challenges at both the Theatre@1800 and SAM. The Theatre@1800 is two miles from the UWSP campus and is not easily navigable by pedestrians or bicyclists, particularly during the winter months. The Performing Arts Series also uses this theatre and has suffered similar student criticism about access but the series faces a dilemma because this theatre has a seating capacity of 670 while UWSP's largest formal theatre seats 372. UWSP often stages events in banquet-style rooms that can accommodate 800, but these events offer poor lines of sight for most in attendance.

SAM is ideal for more intimate events because of the architectural structure and fine acoustics. It is less than one mile from campus with easier pedestrian and cyclist access on the main thoroughfares of the city. SAM is located on 'The Square,' a location with great student appeal because of the concentration of bars and clubs. The challenge with events at SAM has more to do with the changing function of the museum.

SAM started as a private museum dedicated to the work of its founder, David L. Smith. Exhibitions at the museum rarely changed and the museum was closed for the winter months, making audience building a challenge. An offer was made by Smith to donate the museum to UWSP but that offer was declined by the State of Wisconsin which generally accepts all such gifts on behalf of the university system. Smith then offered the museum to The City of Stevens Point, which accepted the gift but was concerned about its ability to operate the museum. The city then partnered with UWSP, the city retaining ownership and the university staffing the facility with a part-time curator who organizes interns and volunteers to operate the space. This partnership between SAM and UWSP has been in existence since February of 2011 and has yielded favorable



programming and diversify the museum audience. The current COFAC Creates theme allows for this through the utilization of the exhibition space for intimate concerts. It is hoped that the museum will expand the diversity of its audience through this type of alternative gallery use. The appeal for UWSP in moving some events to SAM is that the local community perceives SAM differently from the UWSP campus. The demographics of the SAM audience vary from that at UWSP in part because of location. Many perceive access as more welcoming at SAM because it is simply not on the university campus, which can seem intimidating to those less familiar with such spaces. For many in the community, SAM is also more welcoming because it was the site of a community bakery for many years before being transformed into an exhibition space. Though the museum retains none of the interior physical features of the bakery, its location on The Square links it more strongly with the community than campus.

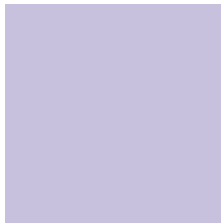
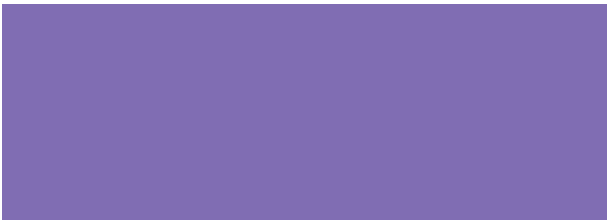
Conclusion

Student involvement in COFAC Creates is an essential and integral part of the process. While many COFAC Creates events and exhibitions in the Carlsten Gallery honor diverse groups (LGBT, Asian, Latino/Hispanic) within the extended community (university, city, and region), part of the mission is to provide opportunities for student creativity. Students have become professionally focused on Chinese art when exposed to actual examples of the work of a famous Chinese artist and the artist who made the work. This experience not only enhances learning but leads to advancements by students making work. Part of the *Floating World* theme was the involvement of printmaking students who spent time in the gallery and then made woodblock prints with a master printer, Yuji Hiratsuka, and this thread can be followed back to the first COFAC Creates work with silent film making. Ellen Larson (Art & Design) was actively engaged in *Xu Bing: The Art of Rewriting China*. With that example of a student

curator, Shellya Rodgers (Arts Management) became the student curator and coordinator for the *Day of the Dead* celebration in the next year. She worked with Juan DeHoyos (Art & Design) to collaborate with other students who built altars to honor their dead. These students included Spanish Club members and Mexican nationals whose families sent artifacts from Mexico such as photographs and other memorabilia for the altars. These same students also decorated sugar skulls, an integral element of *Day of the Dead* artifacts, used on the altars. Active participation by students is one of the motivators for success of these events. Rodgers is now an intern at the British Museum.

Within specific themes, COFAC Creates has provided an opportunity to model inclusivity which has broadened the diversity of audiences. This is having a positive effect on other culturally relevant programming as well. For example, the increased involvement of local, culturally diverse groups has been reflected in the success of programming like the *Day of the Dead* events. In the first year of this observance, there were approximately 25 people in attendance. The second year brought roughly 75, last year nearly 400, and this year 897 people participated.

COFAC Creates enables students to be successful on a number of levels, including within interdisciplinary work. It is evident in student work that these themes spur interest in other cultures and in varied media. The remaining challenge is to broaden the scope of COFAC Creates thereby expanding and diversifying the audience. The outreach challenge is to meet the community literally on its own turf beyond the confines of campus.



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