

Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment: Annual Report, 2010-2011

Summary of Activities

CHUE is FIU's most recent commitment to the promotion of the intellectual integration of community and university life. In May of 2010, the College of Arts and Sciences began work to establish a center that would promote greater engagement with the humanities through academic excellence and meaningful community partnerships within the South Florida metropolitan area. Although we did not receive formal certification as a center until March of 2011, in the fall of 2010 we began to address our mission/mandate through active lecture programs and outreach to the South Florida community.

To introduce CHUE to the university and to the community at large, we organized a lecture series around the topic why the humanities are important. The responses offered by our speakers deftly outlined the kind of work we envisioned doing: identifying challenges facing the humanities, charting successes and failures of humanist efforts, and proposing what can be done to increase understanding and appreciation of the humanities in both the academy and the community.

Jose Gabilondo, Associate Dean at the FIU Law School, began the series with "The Life of the Mind: Protecting an Endangered Species." Gabilondo's talk was important not only because it explored recent encroachments on academic discourse but also his background and his approach emphasized humanities extending beyond traditional fields like English, History, Philosophy, and Foreign Languages to include diverse disciplines and a range of human experiences. A large audience responded enthusiastically to it. The President, the Provost, and Deans from various colleges who made a point of attending the inaugural talk, and their support has remained strong.

Subsequent events proved equally successful in terms of turnout and enthusiasm for the speakers. Ben Mulvey, from the Humanities Division of Nova Southeastern University, echoed Martha Nussbaum in his talk "Why Democracy Needs the Humanities." David Gardiner, former Director of Irish Studies at Creighton University, took a playful look at the humanities and technology, "Yeats, Heaney, and the Russian Cyber Militia," showing that academics need not be humorless when dealing with serious subjects. In "Poetry at the End of the World" John Paul Russo, who holds a joint appointment in English and the Classics at the University of Miami, deftly rebutted the pessimism induced by the trauma of a post-industrial mindset and reinforced the collaborative nature of the Center. Finally, Robert Ernst, a long time urban planner, talked about "The Humanities and Urban Planning," providing the perfect ending for this year's series. It came about after Jesus Martinez and Debbie Lawrence, owners of a local firm, DLM Logistics, attended the Gardiner lecture. They were so moved by the talk that they offered (unsolicited) to sponsor the Ernst talk.

In addition to the lecture series, a seminar that CHUE co-sponsored with FIU's Exile Studies Certificate Program on March 7th 2011 brought students, faculty, and community leaders together to discuss Miami's unique influence in shaping the exilic experience. Participants representing a cross section of the constituencies which CHUE serves and draws upon included: Ruth Shack, past president and CEO of the Dade Community Foundation, former Miami-Dade County Commissioner, and

community activist; Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff, Education Specialist for Holocaust Training for Miami-Dade County Public Schools; Amy Hughes, a recent FIU MFA graduate; and Steve Beaulieu an FIU undergraduate with a major in English. Nearly two hundred people attended, and the lively exchanges over the evening not only enhanced understanding of the topic but underscored the benefits that faculty, students and the general public derive when university and community share with one another their diverse insights on a topic of common interest.

Plans for Next Year

Next academic year, we are moving into an even more important phase: the active involvement of community leaders in bringing aspects of the humanities to the FIU campus. We begin the process with an intense and personal examination of cultural identity. On August 31st we will screen *Parallel Lives*, a documentary produced by our local PBS television station WPBT, dealing with experiences of growing up in Miami from the points of view of a Black and a Jewish woman. Both of the central figures—Dorothy Fields and Arva Parks—have agreed to participate in a talk back.

We will continue talks organized around the theme of why the humanities are important, this time featuring speakers from the community with long-term, ongoing commitments to the humanities. David Lawrence, the former publisher of the *Miami Herald*, will talk on the public face of the humanities. Ruth Shack, already a participant in the seminar mentioned above, will present ideas on the political climate shaping the humanities. Gepsie Metellus, current head of the Haitian community organization, will examine humanities at the grassroots level. And Javier Soto, head of the Miami Foundation, will contextualize humanist efforts.

Over the course of the next academic year, FIU faculty members from various disciplines will go to local public libraries around Miami-Dade County to offer presentations on how to view films, listen to operas, watch plays, appreciate paintings, and comprehend architecture. In each instance, the presumption will be that the audience is already well aware of the artistic medium under consideration but may lack the language and interpretive protocols that would facilitate full appreciation. At the conclusion of the presentation, everyone in attendance will receive a flash drive with a power point version of the workshop. We want participants to repeat the workshop experience various constituencies across the community, touching those not able to attend the presentation. In each case, the workshop's iterations will bring aspects of the humanities to a wider audience.

Finally, as the keynote of next year's efforts, Stanley Fish, Davidson Professor of Law and the Humanities at FIU, will lecture on January 25th, 2012, on academic freedom. Professor Fish is well known in academic circles for his pioneering efforts in literary theory and in the community at large through his witty and provocative columns regularly appearing in the *New York Times*. His talk has an inherent appeal for all the constituencies, on and off campus, which the Center seeks to attract.

Funding

Internal support for the Center has been longstanding, strong, and widespread. The university's President, Mark B. Rosenberg, and its Provost, Douglas Wartzok, have publicly endorsed CHUE and its mission on a number of occasions. More materially

significant, Kenneth Furton, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, has provided a long-term financial commitment, assigning office space and budgeting approximately \$65,000/year to maintain the Center.

Other academic units—departments, schools, and colleges—have come forward with similar gestures of support. The Director of the Center has made personal appeals for financial support to academic leaders, and the results have been most gratifying. The College of Architecture and Art, for example, has made an open-ended commitment of \$5,000/year to the Center. The English Department, the History Department, and the Foreign Language Department have each made one time donations of \$2,000. Other departments have given according to their abilities, and all contacted have agreed to support CHUE and have shown enthusiasm for the work of the Center. These donations demonstrate the material commitment colleagues are making to the success of the Center by reallocating their own scarce resources.

The Center has just applied for a \$500,000 NEH Challenge Grant. It requires us to raise \$1,500,000 on a three to one match. We are also applying for an NEH Grant of \$100,000 to support a three year speaker/workshop program on cultural identity. Notification for both proposals will come next December. This summer we will apply to the Florida Humanities Council for a grant for next year's speaker series and one for our workshop program.

Long-Range Plans

We see as the Center's distinguishing feature the primary aim of involving the community in explorations of the humanities. As the Center grows, so also will its dependence upon and substance of the community. Through programs outlined below, we hope to set a model for new conceptions of how we study the humanities, particularly in the engagement with a broad range of constituencies.

Workshops on Interpretive Strategies. The workshops that we are presenting for hands on appreciation of the humanities—film, theater, art, music, and architecture—will be long term projects sustained and expand on an annual basis. We will continue to present at different venues around South Florida workshops on basic interpretive strategies for various art forms.

Lecture Series by Academic and Community Figures. We plan to continue and expand the program that already has proven to be so successful, presentations by academic and community figures. In keeping with the mission to cross pollinate views of the humanities, we will alternate talks by academics with those by community leaders.

Summer Institutes. To engage the community most fully, we will present a series of summer institutes on the FIU campus. They will follow the model of the NEH summer seminars, dealing with a specific humanities related topic in a sophisticated but accessible fashion. Topics will include but not be limited to explorations of the way cultural identity shapes concepts of American history, analyses of how social networks enhance or diminish users ability to interpret literature and discussions on evolving ethical standards in academic contexts.

Fellowships. Attracting a range of individuals into projects related to the humanities remains a central goal of our Center. To this end, we plan to initiate a fellows program

to nurture and sustain outstanding research which in particular draws upon the community's understanding of the humanities. For the year of their term, fellows will develop projects not only through independent research but through monthly meetings at the Center and with designated community groups to share their work and to seek advice on how to proceed.

Research and Travel. We will offer some support for travel to do research and to present conference papers for faculty, graduate students, and community partners. We take as a given that understanding of the humanities extends well beyond the Miami metropolitan area, and we wish to foster our community's awareness of humanist work and resources that lay beyond county boundaries.

Impact

Up to this point, we have written with justifiable pride about what CHUE has accomplished in less than a year of existence. However, it is important to reiterate that we have done all this on a very tight budget and through the extraordinary generosity of people and institutions on and off campus. While the CAS budget line and direct contributions insure that CHUE can sustain activities in support of the humanities at current levels, this money is not sufficient to finance the more ambitious projects outlined above, let alone allow the Center to expand its community commitment through new initiatives. We need to develop support beyond the base we have already established.

In the fall, the Center will begin a direct sponsorship campaign within the South Florida business community for support, a program that will demonstrate once again our ability to meet the goals of the challenge grant. Events like the lectures and workshops, while free and open to the public, will make a number of people aware of the Center's work, providing concrete demonstrations of the good that comes out of supporting such projects and offering the opportunity for direct and indirect solicitation. Just as DLM Logistics has sponsored a single talk, we think it both likely and appropriate for larger firms to undertake more ambitious projects. Moreover, we are exploring partnerships with Miami businesses which see affiliation with the Center as mutually beneficial. The investment officers of Northern Trust have for years run a very successful history reading group, Prologue, which offers luncheon lectures every other month to the company's top-end clients. We are in discussions with them to establish a similar series on film. We see this as the kick-off to a program that will help us establish relationships with some of the most affluent members of Miami.

A Final Expression of Thanks

The Center has had a very successful year because of the generosity and enthusiasm of individuals across the campus. Deans Furton, Rae, Casines, and Callahan have been unstinting in their support. Our twenty member advisory board has provided leadership and guidance throughout the process of bringing the center into existence. Individuals in CAS--Jennifer Gebelein, JoAnn Adkins, Steven Fernandez, Juan Lopez, Barbara Manzano, Hector Junco, and Gild Ruiz--have given invaluable support. Chairs in the college and across the university as well as the deans of the Library, the College of Law, and the College of Architecture and Art and the directors of SIPA, SEAS, and SILS have extended generous assistance to our efforts. While many others have generously helped the Center, two individuals merit particular recognition. Professor James Sutton, Chair of the English Department, and Professor

Asher Milbauer, Director of Graduate Studies in English and of the Exile Studies Certificate Program, have provided unstinting support and guidance for the Center's efforts from its inception. Much has been accomplished in a short period because so many members of the FIU community have worked so hard to make it come about. Such support holds out the promise of a bright future for CHUE.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Patrick Gillespie, Director
Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment

5 May 2011