

Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment: Annual Report, 2011-2012

Summary of Activities

Although in 2010-2011 the Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment had informally offered a series of lectures and workshops to the university and South Florida communities, it was not until late March of 2011, after the Center had received formal certification, that our work began officially. From that time to the present, we have sponsored or co-sponsored seventeen lectures, five workshops or panel discussions, and five films or plays. Well over two thousand people participated in these twenty-seven events. In the process we have taken on administration of the Provost's annual Life of the Mind lecture, established working partnerships with several major Miami institutions—WPBT2 Miami Public Television and Books & Books—and submitted five major grant applications. We have maintained our website, created a video archive of Center events, expanded our mailing list, and instituted a semi-annual newsletter. We have conducted developmental outreach with individuals and institutions in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. And internally, the Center moved into its current location, furnished the area, added a new Program Assistant and hired several work-study students.

In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on these activities.

Lectures

In AY 2010-2011, 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. We used academics from around South Florida to initiate dialogues on that topic. While the talks were successful from both an intellectual and a promotional perspective, they were but a dress rehearsal for what we see as our central mission, engaging the South Florida community in conversations on the humanities. In AY 2011-2012, we took up this task in earnest by recasting the normal formula for humanities centers. Instead of bringing academics to speak to the campus community on relatively narrow topics, we turned to community leaders from South Florida to speak to concerned constituencies within and outside the university.

The first lecture came about as an unexpected but very pleasant surprise. Jesus Martinez and Debbie Lawrence, owners of a local firm, DLM

Logistics, attended a lecture in January of 2011, and they were so impressed by the talk that they offered to sponsor a lecture later in the spring. As a result, Robert Ernst, a long time urban planner gave a talk about “The Humanities and Urban Planning,” providing the perfect introduction for this year’s series.

Community leader presentations continued in September when Gepsie Metellus, Director of the Haitian Neighborhood Center, spoke on “The Haitian Imprint on the Humanities.” She was followed in November by Javier Soto, Director of the Miami Foundation, who suggested ways for “Engaging Humans in the Humanities.” In February David Lawrence, former publisher of *The Miami Herald* and currently President of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, told us “Why the Humanities Are Important for Children.” Mitchell Kaplan, founder of Books & Books and the Miami International Book Fair, continued the conversation in March when he shared his thoughts on “A Bookman Looks at the Humanities.” And finally, Ruth Shack capped this lecture series in early April with a discourse on “The Humanities in a Civil Society.” The talks were all extremely well attended by the university and the Miami-Dade community.

In addition to that community leader based lecture series, CHUE sponsored three other talks by eminent scholars. In January Professor Stanley Fish of the Law School spoke on “What the Humanities Are Worth.” In February, the Center Martha Vincinus, of the University of Michigan, co-sponsored by English and Women’s Studies, spoke on “The History of Lesbian History.” And in April Professor John Stuart, Chair of the Architecture Department, presented the inaugural CHUE Advisory Board Lecture, speaking on “The Human Face of Architecture.”

The Center’s very successful partnership FIU’s Exile Studies Program also continued in 2011. In November Cuban-American artist Humberto Calzada conducted a tour of an installation of his works at the Frost Museum and spoke on “Exile and the Arts.” In early February, Dr. Majorie Agosin, of Wellesley College, spoke on “Exile, Creativity, and Totalitarianism.” Later that month Dr. Zsuzsanna Osváth of the University of Texas, gave a talk “Word Crystals: Playing Games in Exile.” Then in March David Markish came to speak on “Exiled from the Mother Tongue,” a presentation in Russian translated by Professor Asher Milbauer, Professor of English and Director of the Exile Studies Program. The series ended very successfully in early April with “A Roundtable Discussion of the Exile Experience,” featuring prominent members of the Miami community with their own views on exile.

Performances

August began with a very unique opportunity. We were permitted to host an exclusive pre-release showing on campus of *The Whistleblower*, a feature length Hollywood film that examines human trafficking. The month ended with another unique experience, a showing of the WPBT2 documentary *Parallel Lives*, the chronicle of growing up in a

segregated Miami of the 1950s, and a talkback featuring Arva Parks and Dorothy Fields, the center figures in the film. In March and early April, as a prelude the visit of Sr. Helen Prejean to FIU, we offered a series of staged readings on works relating to concepts of social justice—*The Exonerated*, *Oleanna*, and *Dead Man Walking*. This culminated in a roundtable discussion on April 12th. The next day Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* and noted social activist for the rights of the incarcerated, visited campus with Bill Quigley, a well-known civil justice lawyer, to lead a discussion on capital punishment.

Outreach

The Center also sponsored off campus lectures. Through the work of development officers Paul Landrum and Jan Solomon, we gave two talks at the Vi in Aventura—Debra Dean on writing and Michael Patrick Gillespie on viewing film. With the help of James Sutton and Asher Milbauer, we were able to arrange three talks at the Fisher Island Social Club—featuring President Mark Rosenberg, Dean Kenneth Furton, and Professor James Sutton. In addition, the Center sponsored workshops on how to enjoy the Miami Book Fair, given by Mitchell Kaplan, and how to enjoy Art Basel, given by Carol Damian.

The Center has also made less spectacular but equally insistent efforts to reach out to the local community. The Center has been continually expanding its mailing list, and regularly updates subscribers to Center events. A Center newsletter is published each semester, summarizing what we have done and offering a preview of what is to come.

Partnerships

This year the Center has developed several key partnerships. Books & Books presented a workshop, publicized our events, and indicated a willingness to offer a range of other events in the future. WPBT2, in addition to providing the documentary *Parallel Lives*, has undertaken to record all Center events, made available through links on our website's Archives tabs, and sent notices to its constituents of all of our events. The FIU Alumni Association, through its mailing list, has also been an invaluable tool for publicizing Center events to alumni in Miami-Dade and around the world.

Grants and Fundraising

Over the year the Center has written several grant proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities and three more to the Florida Humanities Council. Although there are relatively few funding opportunities as compared with those available to the sciences, we are committed to continuing these efforts.

The Center has also worked with key figures in development, Howard Lipman, Robert Callahan, and Paul Landrum on various initiatives at Fisher Island, the Vi, La Gorce, and with groups and selected potential donors. To facilitate charitable giving, we have installed a page on the website allowing credit card donations and have become a named destination for donations in this year's Ignite drive.

Plans for Next Year

In the next academic year, we are moving into an even more important phase of our mission: continuing the active involvement of community leaders in bringing aspects of the humanities to the FIU campus and moving into the community in a series of forums and events relating to diverse humanist issues in South Florida. We begin the process in June with a dramatic presentation on campus of *Death and the Maiden* followed by a talkback to commemorate the United Nation's Day of Human Rights Awareness. As the new academic year, other important outreach projects will follow.

In cooperation with the FIU College of Medicine, we are introducing what will become a multi-year series of panels and lectures on the broad theme of the business of medicine. In August the Medical College will host a roundtable discussion on the way health care providers do and should set fees. In the spring there will be a similar roundtable, set in the community, discussing access to health care from a moral and economic perspective. Also in the spring, Dr. Joseph Greer of the College of Medicine will deliver a lecture on the business of medicine as part of the Provost's Life of the Mind Series.

Another multi-year series of panels and lectures is also beginning in the fall. It explores representations of violence in the arts. In September, Joseph Adler, Artistic Director of the GableStage, will host at the GableStage a panel discussion on representations of violence in the theater. In October Stephen DiBenedetto, of the University of Miami Theater Department, will lecture on that topic. In the spring we will have a panel discussion on violence in the graphic arts, tentative scheduled for the Wolfsonian, and Professor Kenneth Johnson of the English Department at FIU will deliver a lecture on that topic.

Finally, as was the case last year, we will remain open to sponsoring additional speaking and panel events as the opportunities arise. The Center currently enjoys a strong cooperative relationship with the Exiles Studies Program, headed by Professor Asher Milbauer. We have been involved in a number of events this year, and look forward to similar involvement for years to come. We have also had profitable ties with the FIU Theater Department, the College of Medicine, the Women's Studies Program, and Religious Studies. We seek to continue these relationships and foster others but on campus and off campus.

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 continued its three year commitment of \$5,000/year to the Center. Over the summer, if possible, the Director will solicit from the English Department, the History Department, and the Foreign Language Department renewal of their previous 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. Perhaps most gratifying is the fact that every member of the CHUE Advisory Board and a number of FIU faculty have made financial contributions to the Center. These donations demonstrate the material commitment colleagues are making to the success of the Center by reallocating their own scarce resources.

At the same time, as university resources are cut, the Center also faces constriction. This year \$3,300 that had been allocated to funding speakers was cut from our budget, and of course subsequent years may bring about an addition diminution of internal resources. The challenge remains to continue strong programming, but this will require a greater commitment of time for both planning and fundraising within and outside the university community.

To this end, the Center will continue to apply for grants from funding agencies already identified and from other possible sources, public and private, institutional and individual. We remain optimistic that continuing efforts will produce strong results, but also understand that it will require even greater effort.

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. An ongoing aim is to establish an endowment that will enable even broader engagement.

The endowment would support the programs outlined below. Through them, 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. At the end of every academic year, we will review these plans and revise and expand as opportunities arise.

Workshops on Interpretive Strategies. The intense activity at the Center this year caused the postponement of workshops for hands on appreciation of the humanities—film, theater, art, music, and architecture. We do however see workshops on basic interpretive strategies for various art forms as long-term projects that we hope to offer on an annual basis at different venues around South Florida.

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 hope to present a series of summer institutes on the FIU campus, specifically in cooperation with the Exiles Studies Program. 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 just over a year's formal 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 upcoming year, the Center will continue seeking direct sponsorship campaign within the South Florida business community for support. 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 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

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