

Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment: Annual Report, 2013-2014

Summary of Activities

For the third year since its certification by the State of Florida, the Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment has more than fulfilled its commitment to engage the South Florida community in examinations of humanist concerns. Over the course of the academic year, the Center offered a range of diverse events.

Specifically, we sponsored or co-sponsored eighteen lectures, seven talkbacks at films or plays, six panels or workshops, and two conferences. Nearly 2,800 people participated in these thirty-three events. We again participated in the Provost's Life of the Mind lecture, worked with WPBT2 Miami Public Television, the Coral Gables Museum, Vizcaya, the Betsy Hotel and Books & Books, the Exile Studies Program, the English Department, the Modern Languages Department, the Theater Department, African and African Diaspora Studies, Women's Studies, Religious Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Center, the Jewish Museum of Florida, the Program for Spiritual Studies, and the Cuban Research Institute. We maintained our website with a video archive of Center events, expanded our mailing list, and continued our newsletter.

Individuals and groups from the campus and metropolitan community have strongly praised our efforts, and the general response to Center events over academic year 2013-2014—through attendance, correspondence, and recognition in media—attests to the important role it has assumed in forwarding appreciation of the humanities in the university and metropolitan communities. We are justly proud of all that we have accomplished in a short time and with very limited resources. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on these activities.

Featured Series

In AY 2013-2014 the Center presented events in two anchor series—the Beauty of Science, and Food for Thought. For both, two goals shaped our efforts: We fostered interdisciplinary and inter-community partnerships, and

we moved the venues for a number of presentations from the main university campus to locations around the community.

We had three formal events scheduled for the Beauty of Science series. A workshop in September at the Vizcaya Museum featured curators, conservators, and the museum director and focused on the challenges of maintaining, in a tropical climate, the beautiful physical setting of the James Deering estate that became a public museum through the generosity of Deering's heirs. At the beginning of the spring semester, Professor Emeritus David Lee gave an insightful analysis of the aesthetic beauty of the biological world. A month and a half later, Professor James Webb continued the series by giving a stunning presentation on the accessibility of astronomy to the general public. The events were well attended, and, as is the case with all of our presentations, they are preserved in video recordings available through the Center archive, humanities.fiu.edu/archives.

The Food for Thought series also went extremely well. It grew out of discussions with faculty from a range of CAS departments all interested in Food Studies. In the fall, a panel discussion at Books & Books featured an urban gardener, a civic activist, a historian, and a sociologist. A month later Chef Mark D'Allesandro of the University's School of Hospitality lectured, at the Vizcaya Museum Garage, on the subtle differences between Italian and Italian-American cooking. He finished the evening with samples of meatballs that left the audience agog. In the spring former FIU faculty member and current Professor of Sociology at the University of Central Florida, Rebecca Zarger, gave a stirring account of a children's gardening project in Tampa. In March, an FIU alumni, Professor Miguel de la Torre of the Illif School of Theology, spoke on the ethics of food production and distribution. Every event in the series drew good crowds and produced highly favorable reactions.

Individual Lectures

We also had several free-standing lectures over the year that blended sophisticated topics with accessible presentations. In October Chen Hove, the Zibabwean exile writer, gave a profoundly moving talk on creativity in exile. In November Dr. Manoj Jain, an infectious disease physician and assistant professor at Emory University discussed the principles of Ahimsa or non-violence. In February, Dr. Nicol Rae, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Montana State University spoke on exile and American politics. This was followed in March by a talk given by Ana Menendez, renowned writer, FIU alumna, and Torch Award recipient, on the power of the exilic imagination. Shortly thereafter, Richard Kearney of Boston College presented his ideas on the complex issue of belief in a post-Modern society. In late March Richard Florida gave the Provost's Life of the Mind lecture on aesthetics in an urban environment. This was followed by Janet McCroy of the Morgan Museum talking about the tactile experience of the Medieval world. The individual lecture program closed with Scott Miller of the Holocaust Memorial Museum

speaking at the Jewish Museum of Florida—FIU about the tragic voyage of the SS St. Louis and its continuing consequences.

In a very special event, the Center commemorated the end of the academic year in April with the annual Bruce Harvey Advisory Board Dinner and Lecture. The annual dinner allows members of the board to invite their brightest students for an evening of food and intellectual exchanges. Following the meal, Dr. Gisela Casines, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, recounted her experiences as a Cuban exile and traced the stages of assimilation through which she passed in a deeply moving and intensely erudite talk. The students in attendance are always deeply affected by the experience, and this year proved to be no exception.

Panels, Workshops and Performances

This year was particularly rich in the number of special interactive events in which we were involved. The month long residency of the distinguished writer Chen Hove allowed us to bring his insights on politics and creativity to public attention in a number of forums. British poet, Dorthea Smartt, participated in a similar program, albeit much shorter program, and students greatly benefited from her wide-ranging discussion of the creative process. In January, students from the FIU law school, under the guidance of Stanley Fish, organized a stimulating forum on the linguistic subtleties of the law. In March, the Center cosponsored a panel, organized by Board Member Nicola Gaviola, on political dissent in Brazil.

Over the academic year, the Center continued its participation in the Theater of the Mind series with four talkbacks after Theater Department main stage productions. It also conducted a series of brief lectures and discussions after each screening in the spring Sigma Tau Delta film series. The Center also cosponsored the fall AADS conference and the spring conference on Zangwill at the Jewish Museum of Florida.

In December a performance of Sufi music at the Jewish Museum of Florida gave Miamians wonderful exposure to this subtle and immensely satisfying art form. And in March we presented a staged reading of the play *Collaborators*, written by Professor Emeritus of English, Richard Schwartz.

Outreach and Enrichment

Curtailed resources prevented a duplication of last year's programs, when we were able to sponsor outreach events on campus, the NEH workshop, and in the community, the Vi lectures. This year the Center 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. The Center Director has met with a number of community leads, like Ruth Shack, Dorothy

Fields, Toni Randolph, and David Lawrence, in an effort to foster strong ties with community institutions. The Director has also been serving on the selection board for summer youth program grants through the County Office of Cultural Affairs. This has done a great deal to make other humanities institutions in Miami-Dade County aware of the work we are doing.

Partnerships

This year the Center has continued to cultivate several key partnerships with off campus and community institutions as well as developing new partnerships. Books & Books presented a workshop, publicized our events, and indicated a willingness to offer a range of other events in the future. WPBT2 continued recording all Center events, made available through links on our website's Archives tabs, and sent notices to its constituents of all of our events. A year ago the GableStage, the Coral Gable Museum, and the Coral Gable Art Cinema provided new venues for events, and we have made arrangements to continue these strong partnerships in the upcoming year with events related to the Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow Exhibition that will be at the CGM in the fall. In addition we will have events at The Betsy Hotel and the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU. 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. In the past we have written proposals to groups like the National Education Association and to private foundations. The absence of extended summer support left the Director no time to pursue these possibilities.

The Center has also worked with key figures in development, Howard Lipman, Marilyn Emas, Emily Gresham, Karen Wilkening, and Paul Landrum on various initiatives with groups and selected potential donors. To facilitate charitable giving, we have become a named destination for donations in the university's Ignite drive.

We continue having 100% of our faculty advisory board contributing to the Center, and we have enjoyed particular generosity from individual members like Professor Asher Milbauer. In addition, we have had several underwriting gifts. A year ago, one of our board members, Dr. Bruce Harvey, gave a \$2,000 gift to the Center and made a commitment for continuing this support on an annual basis. In recognition for this generosity and for his expression of faith in the Center's work, the annual Advisory Board lecture is now named the Bruce Harvey CHUE Annual Advisory Board Lecture Series. This year Professor Jose Gablilondo has gifted to the Center with the royalties of his latest textbook, and in recognition we have instituted the Bobbi Barton Lecture Series on Law and Economics to take place each fall. (An article on this donation appeared in *FIU News*.) It is our strong hope that the generosity of these two colleagues will inspire additional gifts from a range of sources both campus and community.

We hope to do more active fundraising in the future. However, I must say frankly that as with other initiatives the resources we now have do not permit the kind of extended effort that would be most successful.

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. The most effective way to achieve this goal is through campus and community partnerships.

The Center has always enjoyed a strong cooperative relationship with the Exiles Studies Program, headed by Professor Asher Milbauer, and with the English Department, Chaired by Professor James Sutton. Long-term cooperative plans include an effort to establish a summer program for teaching exile literature in high schools, with the hope of offering it in July 2014. However, our most significant and most immediate shared project, outlined below, is linked to the Coral Gables Museum's fall exhibition, *Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow*.

The exhibition comes directly out of Professor Milbauer's efforts over the past five years to bring to Miami an important exhibition that chronicles the experiences of German academics who were forced to flee their own country and who were prevented by prejudice and anti-Semitism from teaching at most American universities. These scholars were welcomed by traditionally black colleges and universities, and strong relationships developed between these academics and their African-American students. To commemorate this the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York put together an exhibition—*Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow*—that chronicles that story. The Coral Gables Museum arranged to bring that exhibit, which has traveled across the country, to Miami in the fall of 2014. The Center, the Exile Studies Program, and the English Department have put together an extensive program of events that will highlight the exhibit and enhance local understanding of this extraordinary experience.

This is not the place to elaborate on all that we plan to do, but I can summarize by saying that it will include featured speakers, now prominent professionals, who were educated at black colleges by these German academics, a day long pedagogical workshop for local high school teachers which will facilitate efforts to incorporate exilic topics into their curriculum, screenings of documentary films on topics related to the exhibit, panel discussions of issues raised by the exhibition, and the staged reading of a play based on the experiences of several academics and students. As might be expected, this is a costly endeavor. Our budget now is over \$50,000. We have

gotten commitments for about half that amount, and we are hopeful that Professor Milbauer and I will receive support that will allow us to continue fundraising throughout the summer. By the end of the summer we hope to have a Center webpage dedicated to information on this event.

Funding

FIU 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. Of more material significance, Kenneth Furton, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, has provided a long-term financial commitment to maintain the staff of 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 just completed its three-year commitment of \$5,000/year to the Center. Unfortunately, the radical changes in the allocation of online funds make it less likely that the generous support of the English Department, the History Department, and the Foreign Language Department will continue at the rate of their previous donations of \$2,000 each. Indeed, this past year, only English was able to much such a generous gift. Other departments have given according to their abilities, and all contacted have supported 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.

Impact

We are proud of what CHUE has accomplished so far. We have done all this on a tight budget and through the generosity of people and institutions on and off campus. The CAS budget line and direct contributions are 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 support from the South Florida business community. Our events will increase awareness of the Center's work and provide 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 seeking partnerships with Miami businesses, like Northern Trust a strong supporter of the Coral Gables Museum, who see the benefit of affiliation with the humanities.

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, Casines, Heithaus, and Newman have been unstinting in their support. Our advisory board has provided continuing leadership and guidance. Individuals in CAS—Paul Landrum, Jennifer Gebelein, JoAnn Adkins, Evelyn Perez, Juan Lopez, Hector Junco, and Gild Ruiz—have provided valuable help. Chairs, directors, and deans in the college and across the university have extended generous assistance to our efforts. Professor James Sutton of English has been particularly helpful. While many others have generously helped the Center, Professor Asher Milbauer, Director of Graduate Studies in English and of the Exile Studies Program, stands out for his unstinting support and guidance for the Center’s efforts. Much has been accomplished in a short period because so many members of the FIU community have worked to make it come about.

Respectfully submitted,

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

19 May 2014