

ACS Mellon Foundation Faculty Renewal Grants

Final Reporting Guidelines

Mellon Foundation Faculty Renewal Final reports are due within 30 days of the end of the project period. The due date is in your award email from ACS. Your report should be e- mailed to mwhite@colleges.org At the ACS Faculty Renewal Initiative, 1975 Century Blvd., Suite 10, Atlanta, GA 30345. Fax: 404-636-9558.

Please address the following points in your ‘detailed narrative’ report with evaluation and dissemination information:

Name of Person (s) Submitting Report Alan Litsey
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Institution Birmingham-Southern College

Name of project/event *Medea*

Date(s) of Project August 2008-April 2009

Amount Awarded \$8000.00

Our grant supported the writing and development of an adaptation of Euripides’ classic play about the nature of justice, *Medea*, set in the contemporary United States.

Six Hendrix students and a faculty director (Ann Muse) and playwright (Alan Litsey) collaborated on a staged reading of the play at the Southeastern theatre Conference, on the Hendrix College and Birmingham-Southern College campuses in the spring of 2009.

On both campuses, a discussion of the play was held, facilitated by Professors Ann Muse and Alan Litsey. A Study Guide was also developed by participating students and BSC and Hendrix faculty members.

The process began in the summer of 2008. As the playwright developed the script, director and playwright phone and emails discussions were ongoing. In early fall, the company members were selected at Hendrix College. Ann Muse and Alan Litsey engaged company members in discussion of the play, characters and the world of *Medea*. Discussion

included how the setting of the story, a contemporary Appalachian community, served to define relationships and theme.

Ann Muse and Alan Litsey worked together to develop the project's timeline. This included:

- Development of the new play over late spring and summer of 2008. Playwright and Director were in contact over this period.
- Addition of student Assistant Director to the project.
- Fall 2009. First reading and discussion with company members, including playwright. Additional rehearsals over the fall and early spring.
- March 2010: presentation of reading of the play in the Fringe Festival, March 2010 Southeastern Theatre Conference, in Birmingham, AL. Reading held at Birmingham-Southern College
- April 2010: Reading presented at Hendrix College. Final post-mortem with company members and playwright.
- May 2010: Email survey sent to students who were company members.

Our process was greatly informed by our performance of the play in three very different settings. The spaces used included a blackbox and proscenium stage. The SETC space was a converted ballroom, with stage and lighting. At the conclusion of the process, company members shared insights to serve the further development of the play. We all agreed that the play would benefit by continued exploration of the Appalachian context.

A very important development in our process included the addition of a student director, Brett Carr. Brett made many contributions to the process as a leader and creative contributor.

Our experience connected to the larger theatre community. The seven Hendrix students presented the work at the Southeastern Theatre Conference for the first time (www.setc.org). SETC is the largest theatre organization of its kind in the country. Thousands of faculty and students attend annually for academic and professional development. In this setting, students had the opportunity to see student and professional work, as well as experience workshops and nationally recognized keynote speakers.

We had planned to perform the play for high school audiences on our respective campuses. However, due to the schedules of targeted secondary schools, the focus shifted entirely to the development of the script and the interactions between faculty and college students within that process. In hindsight, we feel we should have invited schools for a presentation during regular school hours. Needless to add, we would do this with future like projects.

Evaluation

We felt it was important to evaluate our process. Group discussion as well as written responses were solicited. The following questions were posed to student company members:

- 1) What was most valuable in terms of our goal of collaboration and exploring the world of the play?
- 2) What was least valuable?
- 3) Do you have suggestions for the process, or something similar we were sponsored in the future?
- 4) What one word most clearly reflects your experience?
- 5) What have you taken away from the experience?
- 6) Any other comments you wish to share?

We felt the project was successful in reaching its collaborative goals, but we certainly would change our process, based on what we learned about working together.

The overall student work was very good, but we would make the objectives of the project more explicit to students in the future in our initial discussions.

We can do a better job with our exploration of the connections between programming at SETC and our project. In addition, we should examine the use of technology to allow for exchange between scheduled rehearsals with both faculty members and students. A very thoughtful response from the project's student director suggested a tighter rehearsal schedule is in order. We would also include more of a balance between seasoned college students and less experienced students. We chose to include students who were less engaged in the Hendrix mainstage production process. Adding a senior student or two would have been helpful on a number of levels. We consider *Medea* the first of more collaborations in the future.

Certainly, the project strengthened ties between the Theatre Programs. Hendrix and BSC plan to collaborate on a ten minute play festival for students in the next academic year. The first festival was produced this year, and Alan Litsey and a BSC student, Attison Swann, were invited to participate. Clearly, this project was an invigorating beginning as we

continue to explore how our programs can collaborate in meaningful ways.

We can imagine future projects informed with the themes of human rights and human dignity. Birmingham-Southern College has been investigating themes of human rights and human dignity in unifying the thought process about liberal arts education. The College has received \$50,000 from the Mellon Foundation to toward this goal. This project continued to build upon that effort and support. Hendrix and BSC have many similarities. We feel that future collaboration will build on the strengths of the Theatre Programs at both schools.

Medea provided an opportunity for amplifying and expanding the examinations and conversations that currently take place within the College's disciplines, strengthening both the connections and coherence of the curricular and extracurricular life of our students around the larger questions of realizing human dignity throughout the world.

Student Impact and Future Projects

The project cultivated in Hendrix students the powers of ethical deliberation and empathy for others. In addition, it provided a unique experience for students and faculty to collaborate on a new work in three different settings. The students who were involved from Hendrix participated in SETC for the first time in the history of the program. Students of varying designations, sophomore, junior, etc., participated in the project and were inspired by the workshops at the convention as well as the overall project. It is essential in small programs for the students to see the broader world after graduation as well as the world of students at other colleges. While not a goal of the project the impact of the students from Hendrix was great.

The project's student director wrote: "The most rewarded part of the project to me, was bringing to life a play in a completely different light. For some reason, I have a problem connecting with older material, and it is so rewarding for me to see these works reinvented. Also, I had just broken into play writing when this project began, so it was rewarding for me to see the process of how a play gets written. It was sort of an intermediary step that is never focused on, but is so important."

The script will continue its development. In our discipline, production of the play is considered publication. The staged reading in all three venues is therefore a form of publication. Alan Litsey plans to submit the play to his agent in Bulgaria after completing a new revision.

Summary Thoughts

In survey response and discussion with students, there was a sense of appreciation of collaboration in a new context. The students' opportunity to perform in Birmingham at the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) was a significant opportunity.

Certainly faculty collaboration was an invigorating experience. Our work will inform and nurture future projects. Both Programs look forward to working together on Hendrix's ten minute play festival and its impact of college-age writers.

Email your report to mwhite@colleges.org
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