

## ACS MELLON FOUNDATION FACULTY RENEWAL GRANT FINAL REPORT

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Project name: “re-invigorating First Year Humanities”

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Amount of grant: \$5,000

I applied for an ACS Mellon Foundation faculty Renewal Grant in my capacity as chair of the first-year Humanities program at Centre College. In this unique program in Humanities professors from all disciplines in Division 1 (Art, Classics, Drama, English, French, German, Music, Philosophy, Spanish) teach in the two-semester sequence which focuses on the art, literature, and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome (fall term) and the art, literature, and music of Western Europe (spring term). My goals for the project were to get us all excited about what we were teaching, to give us a deeper understanding of that material, and to bring us together as a group to create a more unified staff. All of these goals were met. Indeed, I got comment after comment about what a wonderful experience the two-day seminar was, how much it would help in teaching and just how fascinating and intellectually stirring it was.

Because not all faculty members teach both halves of the two-semester sequence, I wanted to bring in two speakers, one on a topic for Humanities 110 and one on a topic for Humanities 120. After polling the staff, I decided to ask a scholar of Greek art and a Dante scholar. These were areas where people either felt a lack of knowledge or a staleness about their approach. I was thrilled when Giuseppe Mazzotta of Yale University, the greatest Dante scholar in the U.S. and perhaps the world, and Carol Mattusch, a wonderful scholar and theorist of Greek art from George Mason University, agreed to come.

On August 18, Prof. Mazzotta arrived, and those who met him liked him immediately. He gave his presentation, “Dante and the Classical World,” the following morning. 26 members of Centre’s faculty (that is, almost one fourth) attended (at least three people came from other divisions just for fun). Rather than give a prepared speech, Prof. Mazzotta gave us a master class. He had discussed with me what sorts of issues we would like to talk about, and he went right to those ideas, beginning with a close reading of Canto 1 (which is notoriously difficult) and taking on a variety of subtopics including, Dante’s politics, salvation of pagans, the theology of salvation, the way Dante treats Greece and Rome, the importance of poetry versus philosophy, and the relationship between poetry and theology. I had suggested that Prof. Mazzotta speak for

about one hour, but after two he was still speaking in his elegant, thoughtful way, and I had to cut him off so that he and the other participants could get some nourishment! We came together after lunch for a more free-wheeling discussion of the issues that Prof. Mazzotta had lectured on in the morning. Almost all participants spoke, even new members and adjunct members were fully engaged. It was challenging stuff for us and for our guest as well, who was delighted by the complexity and interest of the questions he received.

I allowed Prof. Mazzotta a rest before picking him up and taking him into Lexington to pick up Prof. Mattusch (Prof. Mazzotta had arranged his travel so that he could hear her talk). We went out to dinner and they immediately hit it off, which was good since they were sharing the guest house!

The next morning, Prof. Mattusch spoke on “Art and Text, Art and Technology.” She is a very different sort of scholar from our first speaker, and so instead of a master class that ranged over a variety of topics, she gave us a well-prepared speech of the sort one might give as a key-note speaker at a professional conference—and what a speech it was! Her talk, with its bland title, was in fact a revolutionary rethinking of the basic categories of Greek art. She challenged all of the most basic ideas of periodization that we use in our course (and that one finds in most Greek Art texts. So, while we teach students that Greek art moves from the Archaic to the Classical to the Hellenistic, revealing the different techniques and ideas about aesthetics that they used at different times, she demonstrated that studios and foundries were making art works from all periods at the same time at the whim of buyers, some of whom seemed to want “modern” art and some of whom wanted “antiques.” As she pointed out, we do the same thing today (one might note the huge business in “distressed” furniture). Her talk was riveting; as well it might be since it challenged so many of our received ideas.

After a lovely potluck luncheon at the home of our division chair, Barbara Hall, we returned for the question and answer period. Prof. Mattusch got some tough questions since her talk was so new and different for us. We spent a lot of time talking about specific works like the *Discobolus* and *Doryphorus* and a lot of time talking about what this meant for us pedagogically.

Prof. Mattusch went back to Virginia the next morning, and we went back to our work having learned a huge amount about Dante and Greek sculpture.

I asked members of the staff to write with comments and suggestions. No one had suggestions (except that we should do this again when we could find the time and money), and everyone said that they got a lot out of it. I don't know what I would do differently except that I might try to delegate more, since I really was run off my feet for four days. The few members of the faculty outside of Division I who participated seemed to get a lot out of the seminar, but I don't think that there was a larger impact on those who were not a part of the staff. In part, I am not sure that this sort of in-depth treatment of a subject that the audience has a deep investment in is

something that appeals to a more general audience (for instance, if one knew nothing about the periods of Greek art, one would not be shocked to have a scholar toss them out). No other campuses were involved.

The way that I think this project impacted the institution as a whole was that faculty members went into their teaching of Humanities all fired up with new ideas. Humanities is the only course that ALL students at Centre take, and the seminar enriched their experience both by making experienced teachers rethink their approaches and by giving new faculty some rich material to draw on. To share the results of the seminar with those who weren't there I created a blog detailing what we learned in the seminar, which can be found at <http://blogs.centre.edu/helen-emmitt/category/uncategorized/>. No publications resulted, though of course they still might. But the seminar was really aimed at rejuvenating our approaches to the material in the classroom.

Budget:

Summary of Project:

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, the Humanities Program at Centre College offered a two-day seminar dealing with two core teaching areas within the sequence: Greek sculpture and Dante's *Inferno*. To this end, we brought in two brilliant scholars (Giuseppe Mazzotta of Yale to discuss Dante and Carol Mattusch of George Mason to discuss Greek sculpture). Each gave a long and invigorating talk on the indicated subject, and the staff responded with an afternoon of questions and general discussion. This project renewed our faculty by demonstrating new approaches to key elements of the course. We also simply know more about the things that we are teaching than we ever have before.