

## ACS Mellon Foundation Faculty Renewal Grant Final Report

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Institution: Rollins College

Name of project/event

Project Mosaic: Zora Neale Hurston

A Multidisciplinary Exploration of African-American Culture

Date(s) of Project

August 2010- May 2011

Amount Awarded

8,000

### PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of Project Mosaic was to promote a synergistic dialogue among faculty and enhance student understanding of the African-American experience. Using the work of Zora Neale Hurston as a central theme, the project brought together faculty from Anthropology, Art and Art History, History, and Education to strengthen the Africa and African-American Studies (AAAS) Program at Rollins. The project facilitated the inclusion of African-American content into participating classes using details of Hurston's work as author, anthropologist, and her hometown of Eatonville, Florida to discuss African Americans in differing contexts. These class projects are preserved as web-based exhibits accessible for review and learning. The intent is for Project Mosaic to become a recurring campus project incorporating diverse thematic foci with rotating faculty participation. This model will aid student and faculty participation in the AAAS Program and integrate ongoing service learning, student-faculty collaborative research, and innovative pedagogical inquiry.

## MEETING GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

During the Fall 2010 semester Professor Claire Strom's HIS: 335 History of the South class and Professor Scott Hewitt's EDU 271: School and Society incorporated an examination of Zora Neale Hurston into their classes. Professor Strom assigned students Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Seraph on the Suwannee*, which profiles a middle-class white woman named Arvay Henson living in Central Florida in the early 20th century. As part of their final paper, the students wrote about the historical accuracy of Hurston's fictional writing. Professor Hewitt class examined Hurston's personal life to draw parallels between her beliefs related to black autonomy and her many contributions to U.S culture in early twentieth century. Her education, in particular, was a focal point for these investigations. Students worked in groups of two or three and chose to explore questions related to Hurston and education to investigate for this project.

Professor Strom's class used Hurston's work of historical fiction to examine assumptions related to southern life. As a rare example of Hurston's work examining the white southern experience, Strom used the work to as an observational tool to orient the student assignment. In the course of the class students read Hurston's story, identified themes related to southern life and then researched actual conditions in the South. Their research was incorporated into written reports that served as submission to the Project Mosaic website. The student projects explored a diverse set of social and cultural issues. For example, student wrote reports about the role of women, perceptions of Florida, race relations, social classes, turpentine and citrus industry, and southern gender hierarchy.

Professor Hewitt's goal was to explore how Hurston's idea about African-American autonomy was connected to her educational experience in Eatonville. As part of his class project he required students to explore the development of education institution in Eatonville, FL.

Students were given the opportunity to pursue a wide variety of projects to contextualize education as it related to Eatonville and Hurston. Students were offered the opportunity to create poster presentations, photomontages, video presentation, and power point presentation focus on history of African-American community, Hurston's childhood development, and educational history in Eatonville. Students in Professor Hewitt's class completed a scrapbook exploring education issues in Eatonville, several powerpoint slide presentations based on their research of Zora Neale Hurston and short documentary of interview with contemporary city officials and residents in Eatonville.

During the Spring 2011 semester, Professor Ashley Kistler's LAC 200: Foundations of Latin American and Caribbean Culture class, Professor Susan Libby's ARH 202: Introduction to Art History II (2 sections), and Professor Dawn Roe's ART 201: Introduction to Photography class incorporated an examination of Zora Neale Hurston into their classes. Professor Kistler's LAC 200: Foundations of Latin American and Caribbean Culture and Society examine how Hurston's publication of *Tell My Horse* (1938), a detailed ethnographic account of voodoo culture and ritual in Haiti and Jamaica, helped to revolutionize the anthropological discipline by presenting one of the first-hand accounts of indigenous culture recorded through participant observation. Professor Kistler's students read Hurston's account of voodoo practice and then conducted research with local residents about contemporary voodoo belief and practice. For their projects students conducted a public lecture on voodoo, create blog posts, and wrote final research paper.

Professor Roe's ART 201: Introduction to Photography class explored Hurston's hometown of Eatonville (located three miles from Rollins campus) through a documentary photograph project focused on contemporary life and culture. The assignment for this course

asked students to photograph Eatonville as it exists today. Students were encouraged to consider this project based on their own perspective and the approach was not dictated or structured beforehand. The class traveled to Eatonville to get a feel for the space and its inhabitants, as well as reflecting on the town's history and identity as referenced in the writings of Zora Neale Hurston. The final project for the class was a series of photographs by each student depicting Eatonville based on their chosen approach.

Professor Libby's ARH 202: Introduction to Art History II classes used Zora Neale Hurston to investigate the ways in which the visual arts played an important role in celebrating African-American achievements in Alain Locke's idea of the "New Negro," the broader Harlem Renaissance, and the development of American modernism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students in Dr. Libby's class used Sketchup, 3-D modeling software, to create virtual exhibitions using the Cornell Fine Arts Museum floor plan. Each section created an exhibition focusing on Zora Neale Hurston and the Harlem Renaissance. In addition, these virtual exhibits were used to create a series of six posters that demonstrate the results of the students' work. This poster display information on scholarly research, selecting works of art, writing wall text and a gallery guide, designing the exhibition, and writing a final paper summarizing their experience working on the project.

### EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

This project was evaluated by assessing the work of the students of Rollins College as well their experience in the course. The assessment of the Rollins College students' work followed typical class assessment procedures such as class participation, periodic quizzes, journal entries and final examination, papers and/or studio work. We also evaluated the

experience from the Rollins student perspective via independent conversations throughout the semester and end of semester course evaluations.

### PROJECT/COURSE MODIFICATIONS

Modification to the project resulted from changes in class offering, availability of community partners, and changes in conference participation. Professor Robert Moore intended to use Zora Neale Hurston's use of African-American dialect as a way to explore the debate about African-American Vernacular English in the United States as part of an introductory Anthropology course. Due to changes in departmental structure, the course was not offered. As a result, Professor Moore was forced to incorporate a discussion of African-American vernacular language into a guest lecture in Professor Kistler's LAC 200 course and he also recorded a video lecture discussing the language and folklore for the Project Mosaic website. Professor Kistler initially intended to have her LAC 200 class work with Haitian farm workers, however, due to restrictions on students' time and farm worker availability, students from her class interviewed customers at local botánicas as well as voodoo practitioners.

In addition, to these course changes, faculty travel to academic conference to disseminate information about the project did not occur to the degree planned in the original proposal. Professor Strom attended the Phi Alpha Theta regional conference with students and presented on Project Mosaic and Professor Roe travelled to a biannual photography conference in Portland, Oregon and discussed the project with photographic artists, gallery owners, and museum curators. In addition, Professor Julian Chambliss attended the Florida Conference of Historians meeting and presented on the project. However, Professor Hewitt, Libby, Kistler, and Moore were not able to present in any academic conferences. Without the expenses linked to faculty travel, our approach has been to shift the money associated with travel into other areas. Our

reallocation is based on our original grant and aimed at accomplishing two goals. First, we wanted to support the purchase of materials that can be used to support future projects linked to the African-American experience. Second, we want insure the class experience and resulting projects are disseminated widely. We have purchased additional documentaries related to the African-American experience for the library, we have hired an outside website designer and web editor to help constructed the Project Mosaic website. Despite these expenditures, we still have additional funds to spend. We have used funds to frame additional photographs from Professor Roe's class and to incorporate additional functionality into the website.

#### IMPACT OF PROJECT ON OTHER FACULTY MEMBERS

The collaborative nature of this project created a unique partnership between the Africa and African-American Studies Program and the Anthropology, Education, History, and Art and Art History departments. It has created new and unique course content for students and stimulated faculty interest in Zora Neale Hurston. Indeed, all faculty voiced a desire to incorporate Hurston related material into their future course and pointed to learning benefits for students. As a collaborative project designed to engage students, faculty, and the community to think about the African-American perspective in a new way, it was clear success.

#### IMPACT OF PROJECT ON INSTITUTION

This project has given new life to the Africa and African-American Studies Program. While the Asian and Latin American studies program have significant student support and faculty participation, the AAAS program has struggled to find a means to engage with the campus and the wider community. The college community benefitted by offering a unique interdisciplinary program that infused a consideration of the African-American experience into established classes

in multiple departments. Moreover, this project infused a consideration of local history linked to Zora Neale Hurston and the Eatonville community.

### IMPACT OF PROJECT ON STUDENTS

The mission of Rollins College focuses on community involvement and global citizenship.

Under this mandate we have focus on global initiatives, but have not had programs that engaged with African Diaspora. This grant provided the spark necessary to engage with faculty, who in turn created innovative class projects for their students. This project promoted faculty exploration of new pedagogical opportunities, expanding student learning, and promoting opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. Students involved in these class projects experience an enhanced learning using Zora Neale Hurston as an integrative subject. Students learned about important literary, ethnographic, and historical contributions made by a member of the Central Florida community while stimulating greater depth within the disciplinary core of each course.

### DISSEMINATION OF PROJECT RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS FOR PROJECT

We have several avenues for disseminating information that will fulfill the grant intention. First, we have a traveling exhibit comprised of a poster series based on Professor Libby's class project. Professor Libby has shown the poster exhibit at the Winter Park Public Library from August 1<sup>st</sup> - August 31<sup>st</sup>. Currently we are scheduling exhibition with the Maitland Art Center, the Hannibal Square Heritage Center, and the University of Central Florida. Second, Professor Roe has organized a small, traveling exhibition of a selection of photographs from her class. Currently, this exhibit is on display in the J.K. and Sarah Galloway Community Gallery in the Winter Park Welcome Center in Winter Park, Florida. In addition, we will display this exhibit at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities (Zora! Festival) held in Eatonville, Florida in January 2012. In addition, Professor Roe has a number of colleagues who also focus on community based art projects affiliated with both university and public exhibition venues. Working with these colleagues she plans on showing the work at least two additional

venues around the country. All these efforts will coincide with an online experience based on the project. We are currently completing the Project Mosaic: Zora Neale Hurston website, which showcases each class project and include two lesson plans, one geared toward fourth graders and one geared toward high-school age students. We have included information on the website for R-Community News disseminated to Winter Park residents in September 2011.

Given that the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eatonville is being celebrated next year, this website has the opportunity to be a focal point of activities for people in the region and around the country. Moreover, given Rollins' historical link to Zora Neale Hurston, this anniversary is a natural moment for us to promote Project Mosaic: Zora Neale Hurston. For example, Rollins College hosted a Florida Humanities Council Teacher workshop entitled *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and Her Eatonville Roots* in June 2011. As part of that workshop, Professor Julian Chambliss gave a lecture on historical context of Eatonville and incorporated the website into his presentation for the workshop.

## PUBLICATIONS

There are no publications planned at this time related to the project.

## PROJECT FOLLOW-UP AND FUTURE PLANS

This project format will be an ongoing project for the AAAS program. Having established the format we hope to replicate this process with refinement for years to come. We have already identified our thematic focus for next year and are looking for participating faculty members. As part of the Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference hosted at Rollins in April 2012, the remains funds of the ACS grant will be used to promote a focus on African-American experience. The

conference theme, *Common Voice, Extraordinary Lives: Identity, Agency, and Community* will highlight the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Eatonville, Florida as the oldest incorporated African-American municipality in the United States and provide special focus on Zora Neale Hurston through a keynote presentation. Moreover, the conference call for papers will emphasize a research focus on Hurston, Eatonville, and the Florida experience. Finally, the Africa and African-American Studies Program will sponsor a prize for the best paper on exploring Eatonville, Hurston, and the Florida experience. As a Phi Alpha Theta regional conference, this event will bring together undergraduates, graduates, and faculty participants from across the state and region. The remaining 180.05 will be used to purchase books materials for library. Currently, we are investigating acquiring reproductions of unproduced Zora Neale Hurston plays from the Library of Congress.

## SUMMARY OF WORK FOR INCLUSION ON THE ACS FACULTY RENEWAL WEBSITE

Project Mosaic: Zora Neale Hurston combined faculty from Anthropology, Art and Art History, History, and Education departments in a campus wide project exploring the African-American experience through life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. Using this common theme students and faculty engaged in a meaningful exploration of the African-American experience using differing disciplinary lens. The result stimulated student learning and faculty engagement in class while linking students and faculty to the broader community in a unique way. This project invigorated the Africa and African-American Studies Program at Rollin College and will continue to serve the broader public through the creation of web-based exhibits showcasing how the African-American experience, as personified by Zora Neale Hurston intersects with the broader U.S. experience in unique ways.