

MELLON FOUNDATION FACULTY RENEWAL GRANT FINAL REPORT

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INSTITUTION: ROLLINS COLLEGE

NAME OF PROJECT: THE PHOTOGRAPH AS LANGUAGE: DEVELOPING
 COMMUNICATIVE METHODS OF CAMERA USE FOR PEOPLE
 WITH APHASIA (PWA)

DATE(S) OF PROJECT: SEPTEMBER 2009 THROUGH MAY 2010

AMOUNT AWARDED: \$7,500.00

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The original goal for this project was the development of an interdisciplinary collaboration between The Department of Art and Art History and The Department of Psychology at Rollins College. This partnership initially took the form of a Service-Learning course offered through The Department of Art and Art History. This course paired undergraduate students in psychology and studio art with graduate students and clients of the UCF Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders in Orlando to learn digital photography. Based upon the successes of the course and the natural integration of psychological methods and studio art techniques, we plan to link this course with related courses in Psychology in the future. The project worked to further the scholarship of Professor Roe and Dr. Queen and was also able to enhance the quality of life for a population of people with aphasia (PWA) seeking treatment.

The clients of the UCF clinic suffer from aphasia, an acquired language disorder that is often caused by strokes. PWA typically have notable problems communicating through speech and writing even though thought processes may be unaffected. Without a reliable and effective means of self-expression, their ideas may be essentially trapped. An additional goal for the project was to offer individuals in rehabilitative programs at UCF the opportunity to unlock their ideas through photography and share these impressions with their community.

A related goal was to exploit the potential of this course to offer numerous Rollins College students a unique and hands-on learning experience with a population of individuals suffering from injuries to the brain in a clinical environment. Students also benefited from the opportunity to work directly with graduate students and clinicians at UCF.

The course was designed based upon the premise that PWA might be able to use the photographic image as language, in place of and/or in addition to verbal speech. One of the main objectives of the course was to instruct PWA (many of whom had physical limitations as well as issues with speech and language) how to properly use a camera and, perhaps more importantly, how to *read* a photographic image. Based upon past pilot projects of the course, we knew that an essential component was consistency in process and technique. The bulk of the funds from this grant were utilized to purchase a user-friendly digital camera model for each participant in the course. This aspect greatly diminished many of the problems encountered in prior workshops.

MEETING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

During the spring semester of 2010, The Department of Art & Art History again offered the course, The Photograph as Language, with materials supported from the ACS/Mellon Faculty Renewal Grant. The course was widely publicized to majors in both Studio Art and Psychology and had full support from both departments. The course attracted a mix of psychology and art majors/minors. As Dr. Queen was on sabbatical during this time frame, she was able to fully participate in the course as a secondary faculty member and was also able to conduct research in collaboration with Dr. Whiteside, of UCF. Work stemming from pilot projects was presented at the Academy of Aphasia conference (described below) and was very well received. Based on the feedback from that conference an abstract was submitted to and is currently being considered by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for their convention next fall. Additionally, Professor Roe presented this work at the College Art Association conference (described below).

During the Photograph as Language course, Rollins students and PWA worked concurrently on assignments exploring the visual grammar of the photograph. The first assignments were straightforward and designed to stress the importance and power of basic photographic fundamentals such as framing and composition, light, color and tone. Later assignments became more subjective and focused on broader ideas such as family, home, memory and self. John Szarkowski's text The Photographer's Eye and Stephen Shore's The Nature of Photographs were used as reference books throughout the semester. Students and clients used these texts to explore the language of the photograph and gain insight into how to read a photographic image. During the time at the UCF clinic, Rollins and UCF grad students were able to facilitate verbal discussion by use of index cards, writing pads, drawings and photographs. This allowed the PWA to communicate about their photography in a small group setting as well as practice their speech while discussing something which held intense personal meaning.

Rollins students were assigned advanced readings that analyzed the codes and conventions surrounding the creation and consumption of images (related to both visual culture and photographic theory). By putting these often difficult ideas into practice, the content was reinforced and students were able to apply the basic principals discussed in class to their interactions at UCF. In her book, The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space, Mary Price maintains that "photographs without our appropriate descriptive words are deprived and weakened." Based upon the above stated principal, one of the main strategies we utilized in our discussion at UCF, is the knowledge that description leads to interpretation, which is

a useful starting point for PWA, due to their limited speech and auditory comprehension. By the end of the semester, Rollins students were able to comfortably discuss their work and the work of others with individuals with intact language abilities and with individuals with brain damage.

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 observation of student interaction with PWA as well as general 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.

We also evaluated the photographs produced by the PWA population and the effectiveness of the photographic images in terms of facilitating communication amongst the PWA. Determining the success of the work of the PWA was a bit complex and involved discussion between Dr. Queen, Dr. Whiteside and Professor Roe as well extensive testing that took place within the clinic at UCF.

PROJECT/COURSE MODIFICATIONS

Future sections of this course will benefit greatly from what was learned during these initial workshops. In particular, we found that consistency in terms of process and use of materials was beneficial to both Rollins students and UCF clients. Further training in various speech and language techniques prior to the first meeting with clients may prove useful for all involved, as will training in camera use for members of the staff who work directly with the PWA on a more regular basis. The course will also likely continue to see modification in terms of the time allocated for class/lecture at Rollins and workshop activities at UCF.

IMPACT OF PROJECT ON OTHER FACULTY MEMBERS

The collaborative nature of this project created a unique partnership between the Department of Psychology and the Department of Art and Art History. It has created new and unique courses and scholarship for members of both departments. Less conventional collaborative ventures such as these encourage students (and faculty) to think more broadly about potential collaborations of their own during their time at Rollins College or later in life.

IMPACT OF PROJECT ON INSTITUTION

Internally, Rollins benefitted by offering unique interdisciplinary opportunities for its students and faculty. Despite its small size, there seem to be limited collaborations across departments and this one is a particularly fruitful example of success. Externally, faculty, students, and staff from a larger local institution had first-hand experience with the high quality of Rollins students. This strengthened our reputation in the community and gave us positive exposure.

IMPACT OF PROJECT ON STUDENTS

A large part of the mission of Rollins College focuses on community involvement and global citizenship. This project supported this mission by allowing students to work with a population suffering from a disorder that many were not familiar with beforehand. Students became more adept at communicating with those who have speech and language difficulties and likely gained more confidence when working with groups of people different than themselves. Rollins students developed independent projects related to the content of the course. Many of these projects were collaborative in nature and included input and/or images from the PWA. Students were interested in producing projects that would be of future benefit to their clients at UCF, or other PWA.

DISSEMINATION OF PROJECT RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS FOR PROJECT

An exhibition was held in Darden Lounge at Rollins College that showcased the photographs of PWA and Rollins students. The exhibition allowed participants to share the results of this service-learning project with the community, and many of the participants from UCF were in attendance along with members of the campus and greater Orlando community. The photographs from this show by the PWA are currently on display in UCF's new Aphasia House located in the Communication Disorders Clinic.

Extended collaboration with colleagues in the field resulted in a presentation at The Academy of Aphasia 47th Annual Meeting in Boston in October of 2009. Data from the course was analyzed and presented as, "Photography as a Means of Expression: Performance as Related to Aphasia Severity and Nonverbal Cognitive Status", authored by Nancy Helm-Estabrooks, Dawn Roe, Janet Whiteside, Jennifer Queen, and Ruby Drew of Western Carolina University, Rollins College and University of Central Florida. Additionally an abstract detailing the photography course from the clinic's perspective was submitted to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for presentation at its annual convention in Philadelphia in November 2010. We are still awaiting acceptance of this submission.

The work was also presented as a Poster Session at the College Art Association Conference held in Chicago in February of 2010. The poster was titled, "The Photograph as Language: Developing Communicative Methods of Camera Use for People With Aphasia". An additional proposal was submitted to The American Studies Conference annual meeting in late 2009, and was accepted in the spring. This panel brings together three photographers using photography as a social participatory medium as a means for ordinary people to empower themselves by telling their own stories and was organized by Jason Reed, Assistant Professor of Photography at Texas State University.

PUBLICATIONS

There is tentative discussion of a chapter in the updated edition of the Handbook of Aphasia on using photography with PWA to increase communication skills.

PROJECT FOLLOW-UP

There are plans to offer the class again in the future linked with a psychology course entitled Brain and Language. On a more tangential note, we are creating a course called the Photograph and Memory to be offered in the fall using a different community population (ideally older individuals from local retirement communities).

COMPLETE FINANCIAL STATEMENT

SUMMARY OF WORK FOR INCLUSION ON THE ACS FACULTY RENEWAL WEBSITE

The Photograph as Language Project uniquely combined art, psychology, and community service for undergraduate students. It introduced them to people with aphasia (a communication disorder typically acquired from brain damage during stroke) and encouraged students and PWA to communicate via digital photography. They learned how life changes post-stroke, especially with the development of language difficulties, while seeing that the self remains intact looking for an opportunity for expression.

(Please visit: http://web.me.com/dawnroe/The_Photograph_As_Language/HOME.html for more information on the project, as well as course documentation and other materials.)