

CINEMA TV ARTS DIVERSITY INCLUSION PROJECT FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project was to make an immediate impact on the teaching of diversity of gender, race, and ethnicity in our classrooms. This required a major reworking of materials such that they retained the integrity and substance required of the course work, but at the same time spoke to a broader audience than the traditional white male dominance of cinema and television history.

We met several times to brainstorm and compare notes and insights during the process. Since we teach mostly different courses, we chose to break up the work and take on separate areas that would be most suitable to our expertise. By doing so, we were able to make some immediate changes to our courses, while building a foundation for future improvements and modifications.

MAX NEGIN INITIATIVES AND RESULTS

For COM 456, Producing for the Screen, Max had originally intended to have one module to discuss minorities who traditionally had trouble cracking the Hollywood system. Finding considerable interest in this from the students, he infused multiple lectures with this theme in his class. For example, they discussed disruptors in the film and television industries and how people from outside traditional models are now getting more opportunities. Max referenced Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School who defined a disruption as something that "...displaces an existing market, industry, or technology and produces something new and more efficient and worthwhile. It is at once destructive and creative." He then pursued this theme to discuss examples of minorities and women who have had recent success in the film and television industries.

Max used guest speakers as part of his initiatives. For example, he invited a female editor to talk to the class. Her presentation related to her career progression and day-to-day work as an editor, but also spoke about being a woman in a predominately male business. She spoke about how the landscape is changing, but still has a long way to go. Students were very impressed to hear from such a successful woman, who also happened to be an Elon grad, and many referred to her later as a role model.

Max made efforts to introduce side-bar discussions on relevant contemporary topics, rather than stick to his syllabus. He felt like this was a valuable strategy. One discussion was prompted by the explosion of high profile sexual harassment claims in film and television. He brought in a female filmmaker to discuss her experiences and together they presented strategies to recognize the signs, report, and handle sexual harassment in the workplace.

Cumulatively, Max saw immediate results from his new approach, finding that it prompted several female students to take leadership roles on class productions. These students reported in their self-reflections that the discussions and presentations gave them confidence to take on greater responsibilities in class and consider a broader range of career options.

YOUSSEF OSMAN INITIATIVES AND RESULTS

Throughout this academic year, Youssef made a concerted effort to rework his syllabi and lectures such that a significant amount of time was focused on a more diverse curriculum. The courses that benefited from this initiative were:

- * COM 316 – Writing for Cinema and TV
- * COM 356 – Aesthetics for Cinema and TV
- * COM 456 – Producing for the screen

In his senior production class, Producing for the Screen, he focused on films with themes dealing with personal issues from popular international festivals. The majority of the examples were from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. One of the main projects for that class was the Nespresso Talent 2018 competition, which he discovered as a part of his research.

<https://www.nespresso.com/talents/us/en/home>

The theme for this year was female empowerment. All of the students produced videos based on this theme. Some stories focused on role model female family members, while others focused on examples of successful women on our campus.

He also created modules on various minority filmmakers and their ability to break into the mainstream Hollywood system. One example was Tom Ford, popular fashion designer and director of *Single Man*, who was able to produce the film despite being gay and despite it featuring homosexual content. A second example was the horror thriller *Get Out*, written and directed by Jordan Peele, which ingeniously critiqued racism through the guise of a horror movie. The final assignment for this module showed substantial evidence of the positive results of this initiative. Students wrote and directed short films that took on their own personal issues,

which effectively created discourse on diversity from numerous points of view, at a level exponentially greater than Youssef had ever witnessed in prior classes.

NICOLE TRICHE INITIATIVES AND RESULTS

Nicole taught two Cinema & Television Arts classes this semester: COM455 Directing the Documentary and COM326 Cinema Production. She created and implemented significant new assignments for both. For Directing the Documentary, students had to watch five documentaries of their choice, but with the following criteria: one directed by a woman, one a person of color, and one a member of the LGBTIA+ community. For Cinema Production one of their reviews had to be a film that was non-English Language.

For her Directing the Documentary, Nicole also gave each student a documentarian to present to the class. Out of the 10 that were assigned, four were women, one of whom was Asian American. There was also one African American man, one transgender African American man, and one man from Japan.

In COM326 Nicole experimented with a new teaching tool, requiring students to listen to KCRW's "The Business" podcast and read New York Times articles so that they could learn about a wide range of diverse entertainment business professionals.

Nicole created a new teaching unit in her Directing the Documentary about who has a right to tell someone else's story, especially if that story comes from an oppressed community. The students were required to read the online article "Navigating the River: The Hidden Colonialism of Documentary" by Edwin Martinez. This article has sparked considerable discussion in the documentary world and Nicole was able to effectively bring that discussion into the classroom.

In past COM326 Cinema Production classes Nicole held an unofficial diversity day where she dedicated the entire class to highlighting the lack of representation in the film industry. While usually received well, it often felt wedged into the curriculum. Her new initiatives this year felt much more natural. Because the students were learning about diverse filmmakers via podcast and NYT articles on a regular basis, it flowed into class discussion much more easily. This normalized talking about diversity in the classroom.

For evidence of results Nicole asked directly if incorporation of diverse voices and discussions of representation were helpful. Students agreed that it was. They mentioned learning about filmmakers they would have not heard of otherwise. They also put more thought into how they would represent a person and/or a community when they make a documentary. They spoke of how they need to consider if they are the right voice to tell a story and how they will make the interviewee more of a participant.

Further evidence of effectiveness showed up in the range of student projects. Her students' work this year featured four projects with themes of diversity. These included student productions on drag queens, a black gymnastics coach, a lesbian couple, and a Muslim Imam.

DOUG KASS INITIATIVES AND RESULTS

I developed new lectures, chose new films and television programs to screen, and reframed class discussions in COM 316, Screenwriting and COM 336 International Cinema. In screenwriting we used Spike Lee's seminal study on race, *Do The Right Thing*, as an example of screenplay structure. While we often highlight positives in reports, I think it's important to note areas that need further consideration. The fact that this was an important black filmmaker and an important black film didn't seem to make a tremendous difference to the students who were struggling with the primary lesson of the material, which was screenplay structure. While a well-structured film, it may well have been the socio-politically charged material that distracted the students from understanding the beats of the story. This did not turn out to be an effective choice.

However, we broke down the story structure of the Mexican film *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, which was greatly appreciated by the Puerto Rican student in the class, and widely enjoyed and understood by the class in general. It would be difficult to quantify direct evidence of the effects of developing these new lectures, but there is indirect evidence. More and more students are critical when there *isn't* a diverse range of materials in our classes, and this did not happen in the screenwriting class this past fall.

In International Cinema this spring I put an enormous amount of time into researching new films, and completely revamping the materials chosen. Moreover, I thought a lot about how to frame discussions of the materials because I did not want the issues to come off heavy handed and forced. I wanted to be sure that the lessons flowed organically and I wanted students to draw their own conclusions.

By its very nature, International Cinema has never had a problem with racial or ethnic diversity with respect to the content of the class. However, gender diversity is an enormous problem given that most societies around the world, and especially some of the strongest filmmaking societies (Japan, France, India) are all highly male dominated. As a result, I focused on showing more women filmmakers, and stories that featured strong women characters.

I also used some subtle changes in presentation to push students to think about what they were seeing in different ways. For example, instead of telling students to watch for the female perspective in the Soviet proto-feminist film *Wings*, I mentioned that the director was one of the only women directors in a very elite field of men working at that time. Without further prompt, class discussion afterward immediately jumped to the strength of the female lead, and the strands of feminism that permeated the film.

Evidence of this highly successful semester in International Cinema came through in the students' weekly essays, in which there were some exceptional writings on women's issues, women's empowerment, and the overall portrayal of women on the screen. Class discussion by the end of the semester reached a level of depth and honesty that I have not experienced before in the classroom. The final film screening, which featured a strong young woman attempting to leave her indigenous people for the more mainstream culture in Sweden, elicited strong emotions from the class. International students could relate to the portrayal of the pitfalls of straddling cultures. Women were moved by the strength and determination of the lead character. Several students were crying. I had never created a classroom environment before that was so open, and in which students could feel so free to say the things they felt they needed to say.

SHARING

We shared our experiences and diversity resources with the Cinema & Television Arts faculty at a face to face meeting, and through email.

We are also sharing the final report with our department chair, Dr. Jessica Gisclair.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

During the course of our research we located some valuable tools for teaching diversity and inclusion in media related fields. Below are two links:

EDITmedia.org

(Equity Diversity & Inclusion in Teaching Media) A site that has gathered clips to show in classes, readings that center on inclusive teaching in media production, and a variety of other resources.

The EDIT 10 Best Practices for Inclusive Teaching In Media Production.

PDF <http://www.editmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/EDIT10Print.pdf>

Documentary and Colonialism Essay

<https://www.documentary.org/column/navigating-river-hidden-colonialism-documentary>.