Innovative and Creative Undergraduate Teaching Proposal

Background:
When I saw an iteration of the “Before I Die” project, in November 2013, on an outside wall of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, I was struck by the possibilities for Weber State. My own interest in the intersection of verbal and visual (my text and textile class) coincides with the call for innovative and creative teaching proposals.

I invited Sian Griffiths (Director of the English Department’s Creative Writing Program), Matt Choberka (Chair of the Visual Arts Department), and Scott Rogers (Director of Freshman Composition) to meet with me to brainstorm ways to develop the original idea into a class. This proposal is a result of our conversation.

While all four of us are interested and supportive of this idea, we are not necessarily the ideal people to teach the class. If the class is accepted and funded, we would look for the best combination of faculty from the Visual Arts and the English Department to team teach the class.

Judy Elsley

Project:
This 3000 level collaborative class between the Visual Art and English departments will be based on the “Before I Die” project, started by Candy Chang.

Chang constructed large blackboards on which she stenciled the words, “Before I die ______” which she put up in outdoor public places. Passersbys could then chalk in the end of the sentence. When the board was full, it was photographed and washed clean to make room for more responses. She began the project in New Orleans, but versions of the “Before I die” project have been erected all over the world. Included with this proposal is a copy of her book. You can also find more information about “Before I Die”: http://candychang.com/before-i-die-in-nola

Depth of Impact
We would like to bring the “Before I Die” project to Ogden as a Weber State class, an interdisciplinary collaboration, and as community outreach.

Class:
We envision a 3000 level interdisciplinary class offered by Visual Arts and English.

This class would:
- Build the stenciled blackboards
- Maintain and record the blackboards
- Write personal reflections as well as analyzing trends in the blackboards from different areas of town, stressing both the writing/creative thinking and the mathematical/ statistical/analytical thinking they’ll be doing.
- Create a website showing photographic and video documentation, as well as writings on the progress of the project.
- Work on individual projects through the semester, depending on the students’ interests. For example, photographing the boards at regular intervals; interviewing those who wrote on the boards; maintaining the website etc. There would be a final presentation of their work as way to pull the whole project together.

One of the strengths of this course would be the way the project taps into Gardner’s "multiple intelligences," employing students' empathy and sense of meaningful work to best use those intelligences.
Collaboration:
This will be the first interdisciplinary class co-offered by the Departments of Visual Arts and English.

Community Outreach:
We anticipate putting up three boards:
1. On campus
2. On 25th Street
3. In a mostly Hispanic part of town
The choice of venues should attract different sections of the community in order to compare and contrast one geographical/sociological setting with the next.

Breadth of Impact
Initially, the project will impact:
- Students in both the Visual Arts and English Departments
- People who choose to write on the wall.
- The larger Ogden community who see and read the “Before I die” walls.

Would this be a one-time class and community project? At this point it’s hard to tell. Depending on the success (or not) of the pilot class proposed here, we could see the project developing into a wider community project involving local schools, for example.

The project and class could become an annual event with changing prompts each year. For example, Chang documents a “Career Path” project with the following prompt: “When I was little I wanted to be______. Today I want to be______.”

Measurement:
The class would be assessed by both departments using the assessment tools already in place.
The larger question is if and how the project impacts the Ogden community. We could use the following means of measurement:
- interviews with those who write on the boards
- a photographic and video record of the project
- a final product, such as a book, the website, or a video assessing the project.

Accountability:
- Financially, the project would be accountable for all expenses through a record of receipts. One member of the team would take on this responsibility.
- Throughout the semester, students would be charged with maintaining and recording the walls.
- End of semester assessment would show what students had learned by engaging in this project.
## Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OSB paneling (9), 2x4s, screws, stencils, paint:</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>We assume that cameras and voice recorders are available via the University</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 instructors bought out for 2 x 3 credits</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honorarium ($1000 each) for first two teachers for developing the course</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
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**Total** | **$8500**

December 3, 2013