Heather Joseph-Witham  
Curricular Diversification Grant report – Active Learning and Diversity in Honors Ways of Knowing.

Link to syllabus (the whole course was revised, and likely will be again next spring):  
https://ospace.otis.edu/Joseph-Witham-ideas_about_the_exotic-Jan-2018/Weekly_Schedule

Note – I had to change the syllabus several times during the semester as needs changed for the project – definitely an unusual thing to do.

The class: Honors Ways of Knowing

The plan: To work with the Getty Center to create an interactive project for their annual College Night. UCLA, USC, College of the Canyons and others also bring their work or projects to College Night. I thought this may be a good way to deeply engage the topic of diversity with the freshman honors group.

The experience:

I communicated with my Getty contacts and we decided to showcase diversity with a look at a relevant exhibit and attempt to engage ideas from that exhibit in our students College Night creation. My pedagogy incorporates project-based learning, off campus experiences, merging traditionally perceived LAS and Studio skills which has proven highly effective in engaging students on a topic. It is what I do with my CAIL (Creative Action Integrated Learning) courses and I find that this promotes deep learning.

Our first trip as a class to the Getty Center was truly engaging. Rebecca Edwards who is in charge of College Night and Peter Tokofsky from public programs (and who used to be in charge of College Night – so I worked with him on it about five times) came to show us around the Getty and talk about what happens at College Night, the functions of College Night and show and discuss different areas of the Getty that we can use/enact/play with on College Night. Following this we met with one of the two curators of the Outcasts exhibit for a tour. She explained how the Getty got the illuminated manuscripts exhibited in the Outcasts show and how they got the idea to use the manuscripts to talk about ideas of the Other during the 2016 election of Donald Trump as so many verbal/symbolic attacks on outsiders seemed to be occurring.

The curator took us through each manuscript and it was incredibly interesting to hear the narratives surrounding the images and their functions. There were many images of Jews, usually wearing conical hats for identification, one looking like a demon, another hiding the body of a young boy that the Jews were believed to have murdered for the blood libel (the anti-Semitic legend that Jews need the blood of a young Christian child to use to make the Passover Matzoh). Another image showed how a manuscript artist accused a duke of homosexuality and in another the artist depicted a male lover of Alexander the Greats as a female in an anti-gay commentary. The curator also told us that they had a lot of online flak from patrons who have
told them that art should be transcendent rather than include the kind of social/political commentary that was happening. Of course, this is not only commentary but history and I reminded our shocked students that we had just heard the same thing from a Nicki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, tweet this week who told the public that she didn’t think the music at the Grammy’s should be politicized. In any case, the students were told to journal their experience and that we would begin discussing the exhibit and what we wish to create for college night the following week of classes (week 4). This exhibit/tour also related to issues/readings in class so that there was reinforcement of the ideas that were introduced.

Back in school the following week we brainstormed and finally settled on using HerStory and the MeToo movement as inspiration for our College Night piece. The students did some research on the movements. The next week we went back to the Getty (they had already approved of our theme) and we had a tour of famous paintings and sculptures that in some way intersected with our topic. This included pieces like the Rape of Europa and a Medusa platter. The students and I brainstormed and planned some more and the class split into teams of their creation and choosing. We had some challenges as one person at the Getty that we met with stated concerns about our further exploiting women and ‘victims’ with our topic choice. We decided to create an interactive event that linked HerStory with the Getty works, and further decided that we could do this in a way that was not offensive. In other words, we listened to the critique, used what was relevant, and moved forward. Team One made a photo booth. They wrote tales about four women represented in Getty art – Medusa, Diana, Juno and Venus. They photoshopped images of the women from art pieces and made life sized cardboard, free-standing cut-outs of them so people could take a picture with them. They also made signs saying MeToo and Getty College Night to hold. Finally, they used old fabric to make toga style costume pieces for people to wear for pictures. Team two was inspired by the 2 Cabinets of Curiosity at the Getty. They created a cabinet filled with items that referred to paintings at the Getty that coincided with our theme. People could go into each drawer and touch items such as a toy bull representing Zeus from the Rape of Europa. They made little stickers with HerStory images to hand out. Team three made our introductory sign (who we are and what we are doing), along with creating a Quest, a type of scavenger hunt. There were five questions on the Quest card; each question had the person go to a painting in a nearby Getty gallery and answer a question about it. Then they brought the card back, we did a raffle every half hour with the cards and people won cool Getty supplied prizes like a memory stick or various books. We also had ‘scrolls’ where people could share their own HerStory stories. Team four made a wonderful looping animation that detailed aspects of the stories of the four women discussed in the paintings in the Quest.

After planning we went back to the Getty to meet with Peter, Rebecca and Tony (the head of operations) to work out logistical issues. This was a fantastic experience and it really answered a lot of questions for the students.

Finally the night arrived. We spent several hours setting up and the event itself was a 3 hour event with thousands of college students from the area. The evening was fun, successful, informative and engaging.
Successes:

- Teamwork – As the students had been working together all year (they are together for their fall Writing in the Digital Age class), teamwork was relatively seamless. This leads me to the idea that we should likely revise freshman honors with having really a one year course rather than with a fall and work in spring with a project-based learning perspective in the spring surrounding diversity.

- Fun – yes, this is a thing. Fun learning. When students engage a topic and have fun doing it, deeper learning and engagement occurs. By all student accounts – they had a blast. Not only did they engage the topic, but also learned about planning, working with an outside partner, how much things change week to week with a partner, budgeting, and many other practical things.

- Active learning and Diversity – in truth active learning makes learning about any topic deeper and engages the students on multiple levels. I think the students chose their topic well and engaged the topic (HerStories) well.

Final Result – It worked. It was a very good interactive piece.

Challenges:

- Time Management for the students. Many things came together at the last minute. This could be solved by my trying to micromanage their projects, although there may be other, more effective methodologies.

- Artistic challenges – While there is not that much difference in training between a second semester freshman and a first semester sophomore (which is when I get them for a creative action class), there seems to be a world of difference in terms of what they can imagine, do and make. I attribute this not to training – they haven’t had much by that point, but rather to an awareness of POSSIBILITIES once they enter their majors and see what people can and are doing. Also, they are more aware of the resources they can utilize at Otis – which also makes a difference.

- Getting there – who knew so few freshmen had cars?? In future, if we continue this, we may need to create our project on campus. The students had a great time working with the Getty, but there are ways to make this local as well. For example, I used to organize the Storytelling Festival (which was about diversity – each year we had a theme, so Borders was one, Louisiana to L.A. was another, in another we had Asian narratives, etc.). We held it at Otis in the Spring for about five years and students from certain classes produced it. It’s possible that we could create an experience like that – although perhaps a less expensive one.
-Weather – this is not unusual at the Getty. College Night included a windstorm that knocked us down a dozen times – which made us have to reset things and it was tough. But, I knew this was a possibility and we brought sand bags, just not enough of them...

-Active learning and Diversity – both a positive and a negative. The students don’t mention diversity in their reflections while simultaneously discussing the success of their projects. However they definitely were engaging the topic. Next time around, reminders of why we are doing what we are doing, and continued reinforcement of this through readings and discussion are necessary.

**Perspective:**

I will continue to try to create these types of experiences for our students. I think it bonds them with one another and helps create community, it unsettles them and challenges them but ultimately teaches them not to silo their LAS/Studio perspectives. Diversity is too important of a topic to leave with readings/discussions/papers. Our students also need context and providing experiences that enable them to think and create surrounding the topic in venues beyond the classroom allows a deeper exploration of this crucial issue/topic.

**Reflection:**

**Quotes from student Reflections**

Nick Azurin - It is because of the constant communication that I think the Photo Booth was as successful as it was. Everyone involved felt comfortable to give and receive feedback on the project, resulting in a project we were all proud of in the end. During the night of the event, I was afraid that our Her Story Photo Booth would be too small-scale in comparison to such a big event. But as the attendees began rolling in, more and more people started lining up to take pictures and play dress up for the Photo Booth. Even if people didn’t want to take photos, some still took the time to read through the condensed versions of the figures’ stories.

With the class discussing the different “ways of knowing” it is worth noting that all of us had to consider something we typically don’t consider as students. As students we are given problems and issues as hypotheticals, being asked to create model versions of things, or to
create an imaginary version for the sake of an assignment. But for this Getty project, this was a project with an immediate real-life use. We had to take into consideration our collective class budget, our relative skill levels, timeline, all on top of putting ourselves into the shoes of the Getty representatives. We had to make sure what we were presenting would’ve been an appropriate representation of The Getty and Otis, simultaneously. As a student I often forget that outside of school, there are more things to consider than what grade I get and how to get it. Having this experience with an outside event is something every student should really consider as it is an early glimpse at what our futures may look like.

I can say without a doubt that this was the most intense class project I have ever been a part of, and I would, without hesitation, gladly do this again.

Emma Haluszka - Getty Night exceeded my expectation in just about every way. Just being able to be present at the Getty during night time was such a great experience.
We had such a great response to our Scavenger Hunt and it was so great to see people get so excited about it. I also really enjoyed being able to give Kerri a personal guide through the scavenger hunt and see her enjoy it so much. I'm also really happy the prizes went over so well!

The other exhibits I got to see at Getty Night were also great, specifically the USC costume design one. The mini dresses were gorgeous and so awe inspiring.

Overall I think our class and more specifically our group did a great job overall. Planning could have been less rushed towards the end, but what's important is that everyone got it done in the end. It was a tiring but very rewarding experience.

Dabin Oh:

I can definitely see the benefits of being part of this big project. While working with my group I was able to enhance my communication skills, not only with my other teammates, but also with bigger companies like Copy Bank. At first I was worried that I would not be able to help out much in the group, but I was relieved that I was able to find different ways to be a great help for the group and the project. Though the preparation process was hectic throughout the semester and even on the day of College Night, the result of our overall project was definitely effective. I'm glad we were able to share some "her-stories" with the students at College Night but I also got another chance to learn more about empowered historical female figures. I enjoyed seeing the different ways we were able to get our story, her-stories, across to the audience, whether it was through the photo booth, the quest, Aidan's animation, or the cabinet of curiosity.

If there were a few things I can do differently about our process, it would be to time manage more efficiently. I felt a bit rushed and overwhelmed toward the end of the project preparation because we spent too much time trying to figure out the printing process. However, I'm still extremely satisfied with our outcome.

All in all, College Night was an unforgettable experience and I'm so thankful that I got to be part of it. Despite the struggles we had throughout the process, all of the outcomes I saw on April 16th was extremely satisfying. This project has definitely helped me grow as a team member, an adult, and an artist.
Come discover Her: Stories at the Getty with our special quest! Inside this pamphlet, we have included five images of different works in the Getty featuring various women along with their specific locations. We want you to go see them and discover each Her:Story for yourself with the questions we have written to guide your thinking. We encourage you to take this quest with a group and lead your own discussions and discoveries! Return to us with short responses written on the provided lines to be entered in our raffle for a chance to win some great prizes! To get started, head to the second floor of the East Pavilion as seen on the back.

1. "The Abduction of Europa" - Room E205
   Question: How would you describe Europa's expression?

2. "Mars Disarmed by Venus" - E202
   Question: What is scattered around the floor of the figures?

3. "Joseph and Potiphar's Wife" - E201
   Question: Who appears to be the more dominant figure here?

4. "Danae and the Shower of Gold" - E201
   Question: Does Danae appear unrepentant or accepting of Zeus in the form of gold rain?

5. "Susanna and the Elders" - E203
   Question: Describe Susanna's pose in one word.
OTIS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE GETTY PRESENTS

WHAT'S HER STORY?
HER-STORIES @ THE GETTY

Come join us as we explore the untold narratives of women in history and myths. Her-stories give voices to women who are both victimized and empowered.

APRIL 16, 2018
6:00-9:30 PM
Katherine Han:

We talked a lot about myths because of our subjects for the cabinet, all dealing with women and the variety of status that they portrayed in their respective stories. There were women who were high and low status alike that would be kidnapped or used by men for their own deeds. Yet there were also strong women, such as the goddess Aphrodite who could disarm the war god Ares, or the German princess with a piercing stare that made it clear she was not to be trifled with. There were women who were othered in some of our pieces though, such as Jesus and the Adultress, as the adultress was seen as sinful and was almost killed by stones had Jesus not stepped in. For all of these stories to be powerful enough to be referenced in popular culture, it shows just how strong a myth can be and how they can be used in media as something almost akin to a secret that many share.

When it comes to research, we based our projects on two cabinets that belonged to the Getty, as well as various paintings and artworks that were found there for our items. We took a lot of inspiration from them, and while we certainly weren’t able to do anything too detailed like openable drawers and secret compartments, the style that we went for does take inspiration from them in their design. The double sided cabinet is reminiscent of Kabinettschrank, the revolving cabinet with multiple doors and cabinets, and we aimed for a similar decorative style to the Borghese-Windsor Cabinet.

Our end result was super effective, we were both amazed at how nice it turned out, and how it conveyed our ideas clearly. It could be seen on the day of College Night as well, I saw lots of people coming up to look at the cabinet and they were always amazed at how we could’ve made such a thing. Oftentimes we’d use it to attract people towards the Herstory quest since our projects were connected. So if someone began looking at the cabinet we’d point them to the quest, and if someone went to the quest first they would also ask that they look at the cabinet.

Reimi Mosses:

The whole Getty project was such an immersive experience. I think it was extremely good for teaching us how to work as a team and create multiple projects that were cohesive enough to create one big project. Also having a whole set up for just our class, making activities for people, and seeing how each person interacts with the pieces was a really amazing experience.