New minor brings social purpose to the arts

By Theresa Gaffney
October 16, 2014
Section: News

Brandeis students have always been known for being extremely involved and dedicated to academics. This semester, a new minor has sprung up for students to explore. Creativity, the Arts and Social Transformation (CAST) is a new interdisciplinary minor, with requirements within departments ranging from English to theater, African and Afro-American studies, economics, music and more.

CAST is designed to teach students how to fuse their talents with purposes of social justice and change through various modes of creative presentation. Through theory and practice, students will engage in creative and expressive learning practices through various departments. Currently, the minor requirements include one core course, four electives, and a capstone experience. This capstone could be anything from an internship to an event, or even a portfolio.

For many, the fact that this is an interdisciplinary minor is a big advantage. “This is not just a minor for people in the arts,” said Dennis Hermida ’16, who recently declared the minor. To Hermida, the most beneficial and important aspect of the minor is the range of departments that it covers. “It’s a great marriage between the arts and everyday life,” he said.

The idea for this new minor came from a group of students, after they took a class called The Arts of Building Peace with Professor Cynthia Cohen (PAX). The idea turned into a proposal that was reviewed by members of the Councils of the Creative Arts and the Divisions of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Many faculty members and members of the University Curriculum Committee participated in designing the minor.

The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life also influenced the creation of CAST, with their program in Peacebuilding and the Arts. This program has created anthologies and a documentary film. These products have also been used internationally, in undergraduate and graduate education programs.

“The minor will allow Brandeis students to benefit from the relationships established during this international work, linking them with experienced practitioners who can serve as mentors,” said Cohen.

While the news of the new minor has been slowly spreading around Brandeis, many students have already taken interest in the opportunity. A few students have already declared the minor, and even more have expressed interest. According to Cohen, whether the minor develops into a major depends on how the program evolves and whether students are interested in pursuing it further.

Hermida was one student eager to declare the minor. “This is the type of art that I believe in,” he said. “It transcends generations, races and ethnicities and just focuses on creating social change and giving disempowered voices the opportunity to be heard.”

Creativity, the Arts and Social Transformation has already received support from outside the Brandeis community. “We have recently received support from the Max and Sunny Howard Memorial Foundation, which will allow us to create a community of inquiry among the faculty and students in the minor, offer both faculty and students small grants for creative and scholarly work for the minor and host several gatherings and events,” said Cohen.

For students who want to learn more about the minor, on Thursday, Oct. 28, there will be a lunch from 12:15-2:00 p.m. in the SCC Multipurpose Room. Students will be able to ask questions about the minor and will also receive light refreshments. They will get the chance to see a spoken word performance by Dean of Student Life Jamele Adams.

Professor Jennifer Cleary (THA) is the undergraduate advising head for the minor. Students looking to declare the minor should meet with Cleary.

“There are many students at Brandeis who have interests in both the arts and in social change,” Cohen said. “The minor will support them to create a coherent sequence of courses to explore the relationship between creativity and social transformation in a focused and nuanced way.”

- See more at: http://thebrandeishoot.com/articles/14502#sthash.QpkjORGk.dpuf