



Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation

Annual Report

July 2015

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Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation Annual Report July 2015

Introduction

This report outlines the activities of the Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation (CAST) minor in the 2014-2015 academic year. The first sections describe the development of the minor; the support staff; the recruitment efforts; and the opportunities CAST provided faculty and students in its first year. The next section describes the inaugural Introduction to CAST course, covering the assignments and general activities of the class. The final section provides information about the first ever CAST graduates and how they were formally recognized.

None of the events and opportunities listed in this report would be possible without the generous gift from Elaine Reuben '63 and, through Naomi Sinnreich P '13, the Max and Sunny Howard Memorial Foundation. This support allowed CAST the flexibility to promote creative projects as well as host conversations and events that invited affiliated students and faculty into an interdisciplinary community of inquiry. We also express deep gratitude to both Naomi Sinnreich and Elaine Reuben for their vision and support.

Approval of Faculty of the CAST Minor

The CAST minor was developed through an 18-month consultation process with the University Curriculum Committee, including a final review. The Faculty conducted two readings of a proposal that outlined the minor's goals and processes. Attached is the [proposal](#) submitted for review and [remarks](#) Cynthia Cohen made to the faculty about the proposal.

Staffing

Two assistants supported the CAST minor: Lisette Anzoategui, Dual MA Candidate, Sustainable Development and Coexistence and Jennifer Largaespada '16. Each worked between 5 and 10 hours a week and assisted with event planning, communications, and general administrative support. Largaespada was also the teaching assistant for the CAST 150b Introduction to Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation course in the spring 2015 semester.

Recruitment Efforts

Activity Fair



In fall 2014, CAST student workers staffed a table at the annual activities fair, at which student clubs and select departments and centers present opportunities to the student body. Publicity materials about the minor were distributed, and an undergraduate student representative described courses and provided additional information about the minor.

The CAST Minor Launch

The minor was officially launched on October 28, 2014. The [event](#) was open to the Brandeis community and featured talks by the following faculty members affiliated with the CAST minor:

Joyce Antler (African and Afro-American Studies; American Studies; History; Women's and Gender Studies)

Jennifer Cleary (Education; Theater Arts)

Adrienne Krstansky (Theater Arts)

David Cunningham (Sociology)

Sue Lanser (Comparative Literature, English, Romance Studies, Women's and Gender Studies)

Dean of Student Life Jamele Adams performed spoken word poetry, and students who have taken courses that are now considered CAST electives made presentations. During breakout group sessions, participants were asked to discuss how they understand the nexus among creativity, the arts, and social transformation. When the groups reconvened to share, 60-second "reports" ranged from a rap performance to a commercial to a solemn and poignant description of what it means to receive institutional permission to express oneself artistically for the good of others.

Student Committee

In fall 2014, a [student committee](#) was created, comprised of students already enrolled in the minor or committed to enrolling, or who had significant ties to the Peacebuilding and the Arts program. The 9 members included 1 recent alumnus, 2 seniors, 3 juniors, 1 sophomore, 1 first year, and 1 graduate student. At the first committee meeting the discussion centered around strategies each member could use to publicize the minor; at the end of the fall semester, the committee reconvened to assess the collective impact of their individual publicity efforts.



From left to right: Nate Shaffer '16, Dennis Hermida '17, Ryan Millis '15, Maggie Ziegel '18, Tamara Garcia '18

Faculty Committee

A [faculty committee](#) was created to govern the minor. Its members are:

Gannit Ankori (Fine Arts)

Joyce Antler (African and Afro-American Studies; American Studies; History; Women's and Gender Studies)

Jen Cleary (Education; Theater Arts)

Cynthia Cohen (CAST; Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies)

Recruitment Efforts

David Cunningham (Sociology)
Judith Eissenburg (Music)
Kathryn Graddy (Economics; Business)
Thomas King (English)
Adrienne Krstansky (Theater Arts)
Sue Lanser (Comparative Literature, English, Romance Studies, Women's and Gender Studies)
Dan Terris (American Studies)

Cynthia Cohen and Jennifer Cleary served as co-chairs during the first semester. Jennifer Cleary (Theater) serves as Undergraduate Advising Head, with Thomas King (English) acting as interim Undergraduate Advising Head when Cleary was on sabbatical in spring 2015.

Publicity Materials

The main publicity materials generated were a [postcard](#) indicating where to get more information about the minor and a [brochure](#) with brief descriptions of the minor and the courses available (please see attached) The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, which provides the administrative home for the minor, also included information about the minor in their weekly [e-newsletter](#), Ethics Central Weekly, and in the twice-annual hard copy version of the [newsletter](#), Ethics Central. Sample copies of these newsletters are attached.

Media Coverage



The launch of the minor received considerable [media attention](#). CAST was featured in the Brandeis Magazine, [State of the Arts](#) Fall 2014 [issue](#) as well as in the Brandeis student publication, [The Hoot](#) (Oct. 16, 2014). The minor was also mentioned in the January 2015 issue of the [American Theater magazine](#), in an article featuring academic programs on performance and social change. These articles are attached.

Additional Outreach to Students and Faculty

At all CAST events, sign-up sheets were distributed and interested participants were added to an on-campus listserv. We isolated the faculty contacts and sent them emails reminding them to mention the CAST minor to students taking their courses. We also made class visits in which we promoted the minor, collected email addresses, and answered questions. A letter announcing the faculty award opportunity (see next page) was sent by the Provost's office to all faculty members. The CAST minor was also listed as a cosponsor for other campus events, such as a screening of the film *Traitors* on March 8th, 2015 in honor of International Women's Day.

Opportunities for Faculty and Students

Faculty Awards

Four faculty applicants of eight received [CAST Faculty Awards](#) in fall 2014 for projects they are implementing over the spring-fall 2015 semesters. Recipients were chosen by a small subset of the faculty committee. The awards will support creative and scholarly inquiry into theory and practice at the nexus of arts, culture and social change; enhance teaching and advising; and animate an interdisciplinary conversation about creativity, social justice and peacebuilding through the arts.

The inaugural CAST Faculty Grant projects include:

"Performance and the Rehumanization of the Other" – Prof. Adrienne Krstansky (Theater) will study the themes of resistance, rehumanization and reconciliation that are the organizing principle of the Acting Together on the World Stage anthology and documentary produced by the Ethics Center's Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, and Theatre Without Borders: "I wish to understand how the making of theater with communities in crisis contributes to these 'three Rs,'" says Krstansky. She will synthesize her research by developing the syllabus for an undergraduate course on theater and race.



"The Birdsong Project" – Prof. Judith Eissenberg (Music) will collaborate with Prof. Dan Perlman (Biology), students, a composer and guest artists to produce a new musical work incorporating the songs of birds at risk of extinction. "Musicians and scientists will be working together to amplify the voices of our fellow non-human beings in an effort to forge a more positive relationship between humans, animals, and the environment," says Eissenberg.



"My American Girls" – Azlin Perdomo, (Hispanic Studies, Romance Studies) will create an interactive art website that will engage students in the lives of five undocumented women she will interview. "Visually and structurally, it will closely resemble the American Girl website to invite the viewer to compare and confront how these immigrant women, not legally recognized as citizens, are indeed Americans," says Perdomo.

"Choreographing the Disabled Body: Gender, Performance, and Zionism in the work of Tamar Borer" – Prof. Iana Szobel (Near Eastern and Judaic Studies) will engage students in her research into the work of prominent Israeli artist Tamar Borer. Despite a car accident that left her paralyzed in both legs, Borer continues to dance, create, teach and perform. "The project addresses Tamar Borer's art in relation to Israeli dance and culture in order to explore control and fragility, as well as sexuality, along with femininity and sexual vulnerability," says Szobel. "Additionally, this study contextualizes Borer's work within its larger Israeli political settings."



Opportunities for Faculty and Students

Student Awards

Students enrolled in the Introduction to CAST 150b, and any students who had previously completed a similar course, The Arts of Building Peace, were eligible to submit [proposals](#) at the end of April for CAST-related projects that would take place over the summer. Of 20 eligible students, 4 submitted applications and 3 were [selected](#) to receive the award and subsequent funding. Recipients were chosen by a subset of the student committee. The projects funded were:

LaShawn Simmons '18 - Ebony Axis Zine



LaShawn Simmons plans to invite women within the Brandeis community (primarily undergraduate, and alumnus, but open to graduate students and faculty), who identify as Black, to contribute poetry to a zine entitled Ebony Axis. This publication will showcase the beautiful and varied narratives of Black women on campus through poetry. In addition to the zine, LaShawn will organize and host a coffeehouse event that will be open to all students across campus. Participants will engage in critical conversations and dialogue with Black women, while also creating atmosphere of encouragement and empowerment. The coffeehouse will be open for performers and audience members to sing and ultimately share narratives in a space that is open for all audiences and types of people.

Sarah McCarty '15 and Brontë Velez '16 - Sound Mapping: Listening for Change



Sarah McCarty and Brontë Velez recognize that the concept of listening has long been insufficient in working towards critical transformation and progress in the world. They believe that listening is the beginning of learning, critical thinking, challenging, creating, producing, and transforming. Active listening in creative transformation and arts praxis can lead to the facilitation of space for all humans to know themselves as creators and to in turn recreate and reprioritize what is valued, appreciated, read, experienced, and understood in the world.

With the support of the CAST grant, the pair travelled this summer to the Venice Biennale, a major platform in the art world for creative discussion and evaluation. The Biennale aims to curate more spaces of dialogue that will question and challenge the elitism and inaccessibility of the 'art world,' though Sarah and Brontë believe that its social, economic, and geographical isolation prevents it from yet reaching this goal. Based on their learnings and experience, they will create "soundmapping" works, focusing on sound, movement, performance and video, to critically examine and respond to the historically exclusive and inaccessible institutional spaces of the art world and the historical Western art canon. They believe in the concept of artist as cartographer, choreographing new routes to arrive at a listening that leads to activating and implementing real social transformation. They will present the "Sound Mapping – Listening for Change" project during the residency of Syrian musician Kinan Azmeh and [MusicUnitesUS](#) at Brandeis University in the fall semester of 2015.

Opportunities for Faculty and Students

Facilitating Difficult Conversations Workshops

In January 2015, Brandeis' Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts and the student advisory committee of the CAST minor, in collaboration with the Brandeis Intercultural Center (ICC), hosted a workshop for students titled '[Facilitating Difficult Conversations](#).' With the hope of generating future opportunities for discussion within the Brandeis community, the workshops served as a timely opportunity for a diverse group to delve into an intensive and deep conversation about identity and about how power dynamics affect our capacity to engage in productive conversation and collaborative action. Staff that helped coordinate the event included director of the ICC, Monique Gnanaratnam; Jace Kirshner, associate director of the ICC; and Jennifer Largaespada,'16.

Participants were recruited during the winter break, through the networks of the ICC, the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, the CAST student advisory committee, the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, and the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. 16 students applied to participate in the workshops and 14 were accepted (2 had scheduling conflicts). The application for the workshops is attached.

Of the 14 accepted, 9 were students of color, 5 were white, and several of were affiliated with the LGBTQ community and organizations. The group included a first-year student, two seniors, two MA candidates at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, and the rest were evenly divided among sophomores and juniors.

The workshops focused primarily on issues of identity, self-awareness, and building relationships within the group. Coexistence facilitator Farhat Agbaria, the musician and cultural worker Jane Wilburn Sapp, and Cynthia Cohen led the workshops, which convened for 3 hours on January 22, 3 hours on January 23, and 7 hours on January 24.

CAST Introductory Course (CAST 150b)

Fifteen students enrolled in the inaugural CAST introductory course in spring 2015 ([syllabus](#) attached). They were predominantly first year students interested in pursuing the minor. The course was held weekly on Tuesday afternoons for three hours and had three major assignments. The first was an oral history assignment in which students had to interview someone who came from a different background and then present the class with a creative work inspired by the interview. Some of these presentations were revised as a final project for the final assignment and performed at the Leonard Bernstein Festival of the Creative Arts (see next page). For the second assignment, students were divided into groups and assigned to internships with established organizations whose goals and/or mission line up with the goals for of the course and of CAST (see below). Students also wrote weekly reflections in which they discussed their opinions on course readings for the week and had a chance to ask questions which guided the class discussion.

Local field trips provided students a chance to meet individuals who have chosen to pursue interests and careers at the intersection of creativity and social transformation. A class visit to the Rose Art Museum involved a tour by director, Christopher Bedford, of a new exhibition, which focused on abstract painting and sculpture by African Americans with an emphasis on work made in the 1970s. Another class trip was to the Brandeis Library to view an exhibition curated by two student interns entitled *Disrupted Spaces*. More than an opportunity to engage with the artwork, which dealt with themes of belonging as well as physical and theoretical boundaries, viewing student work enabled CAST students to broaden their sense of what they can accomplish in their environment. Listening to the student curators describe their experiences of their process, from the project's conception to unveiling, inspired students to raise the bar for their own socially conscious art.

In addition to ventures outside the classroom and regular class discussion, several guest lecturers were invited, including Toni Shapiro-Phim and Fatu Gaylor (see below) and others. In the final class session Jane Wilburn Sapp, a gifted pianist, worked with students to craft lyrics for a song that to which she provided melodies in an improvisational way. Several students described the final session as the “best class ever” in their course evaluations.

Design Labs

The second major assignment of CAST 150b involved work on design labs: processes for bringing together various constituencies related to a problem, issue or possibility to think in creative ways and to design structures, processes, or expressions that lead to a more just, peaceful, resilient, and vibrant communities. Students assisted 4 established organizations with projects whose goals necessitated creative mechanisms:

[The Ombuds Advocacy Committee at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management](#)

[The Brandeis Labor Coalition](#)

[The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture](#)

[The Portraits of Purpose team](#)

Each student group researched and compiled documents to send to design lab participants prior to the workshops. Some students acted as rapporteurs during the design labs and compiled final reports on the labs' outcomes (attached).

CAST Introductory Course (CAST 150b)

Residence of Toni Phim-Shapiro-Phim and Fatu Gayflor



On March 3rd through the 5th, CAST [hosted](#) anthropologist/dance scholar Toni Shapiro-Phim and singer/activist Fatu Gayflor at Brandeis. They made guest appearances in three different classes: two in the Theater department—Dancing the African Diaspora and Moving Women/Women Moving—and one in the CAST 150b class.

They gave a lunch presentation about their work for graduate students at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management. Their visit overlapped with that of the Director of the British Council, Paul Smith, as well as with Naomi Sinnreich, P'13, a supporter of the CAST minor.



Festival of the Arts

CAST played an important role in the week-long [Leonard Bernstein Festival of the Creative Arts](#) at Brandeis, an annual event showcasing nationally acclaimed performers and visual artists together with music, dance, theater, film and artwork by more than 300 Brandeis students and alumni. For their final assignment of CAST 150b, several students presented revised versions of their oral history assignments at a festival event. The CAST event also included a screening of the documentary *Acting Together on the World Stage* and a discussion session about the minor (promotional flyer attached). A student from CAST 150b who presented a theatrical performance also emceed the event. In total, the CAST session of the festival included 11 performances and 4 visual artist's' works. Brandeis alumna, supporter of the CAST minor and the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, Elaine Reuben '63, was in attendance.

Graduation

The first students to graduate with a Brandeis minor in Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation were Sarah McCarty and Ryan Millis. McCarty was a Studio Arts major and Millis majored in Theater Arts. Millis performed his capstone project, which took the form of an extended monologue, in front of members of the CAST faculty committee in early May. McCarty's capstone will be presented in fall 2015 this upcoming fall when she completes her coursework. The CAST graduation reception was acknowledged as part of the larger Fine and Performing Arts reception during the Brandeis Commencement ceremonies.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: [Photos from CAST Launch](#)
- Attachment 2: [Faculty Meeting Presentation of CAST](#)
- Attachment 3: [Proposal for CAST Minor](#)
- Attachment 4: [CAST postcard](#)
- Attachment 5: [CAST brochure](#)
- Attachment 6: [Ethics Center Newsletter featuring CAST](#)
- Attachment 7: [Brandeis State of the Arts article featuring CAST](#)
- Attachment 8: [Brandeis Hoot article about CAST](#)
- Attachment 9: [American Theatre feature of CAST](#)
- Attachment 10: [Call for proposals for CAST Small Grants for Faculty](#)
- Attachment 11: [Call for proposals for CAST Small Grants for Students](#)
- Attachment 12: [Facilitating Difficult Conversations](#)
- Attachment 13: [CAST 150 Syllabus](#)
- Attachment 14: [Ombuds Design Lab Report](#)
- Attachment 15: [United States Department of Arts and Culture \(USDAC\) Design Lab Report](#)
- Attachment 16: [Portraits of Purpose Design Lab Report](#)
- Attachment 17: [Brandeis Labor Coalition Design Lab Report](#)
- Attachment 18: [Leonard Bernstein Festival of Arts: Mini-Festival of Creativity, the Arts, and Transformation - Flyer](#)