



Brandeis
UNIVERSITY

Annual Report 2024–2025

**The Interdisciplinary Minor in
Creativity, the Arts, and Social
Transformation (CAST)**

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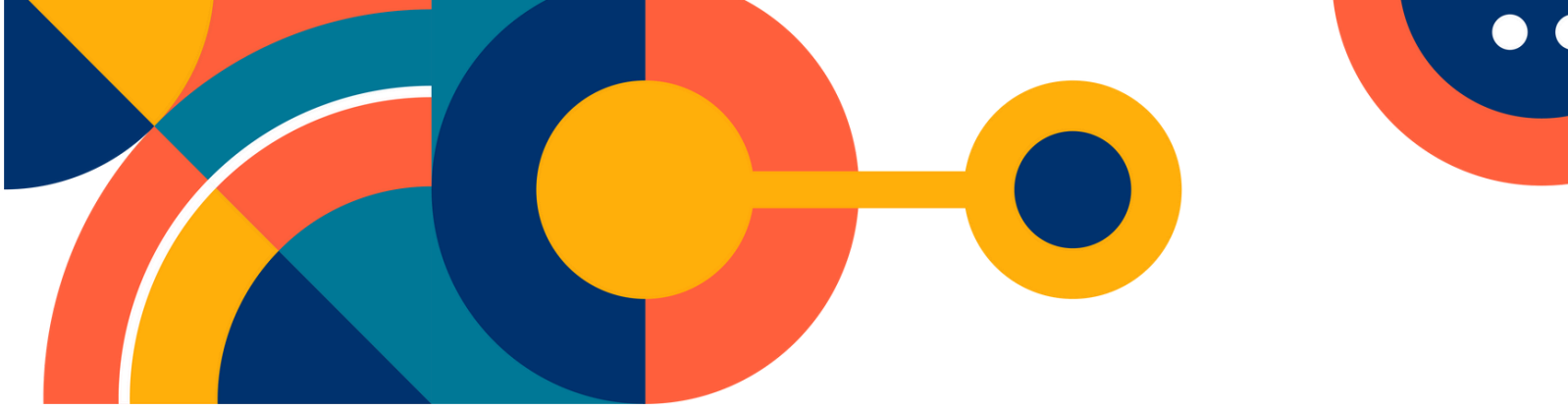
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**The Interdisciplinary
Minor in Creativity,
the Arts, and Social
Transformation**



The students, faculty, and staff of the Interdisciplinary Minor in Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation (CAST) are enormously appreciative of the contributions of Elaine Reuben '63 whose support has made possible many of the activities described in this annual report.

Many thanks also to past supporters: Ammad Bahalim, '04, for his visionary support of CAST 170a: Documenting Immigrant Experiences; Amy Merrill '68, Max and Sunny Howard Memorial Foundation, with the inspiration of Naomi Sinnreich P'13; Louis D. Brandeis Legacy Fund for Social Justice for its support of Let's Make a Better World: Stories and Songs by Jane Sapp, and video podcasts related to the movement for racial justice and the imperatives to vote, and the development of an archive in the Brandeis Library.





Highlight

Within the CAST 140 A: Theory and Praxis of Community Engagement Course, Cameron Samuels, Leila Uwamungu Gasaro, and Sophia Berlinger hosted a “Let Them Read” event in Rapaporte Treasure Hall, with information about book bans across the U.S., and actions that people are taking and can take to counter them. The event included activities such as bookmark-making and storytime. During the latter, people read children’s books (each of which has been banned somewhere) aloud. Participants also wrote postcards to legislators which we mailed for them. Cameron had traveled to Washington, D.C., for the April Supreme Court hearing related to access to books. Their experience there, and learnings from that day, were incorporated into “Let Them Read.”





1. Contribution to DEI at Brandeis

All CAST-designated courses prioritize the inclusion of materials (reading and audio-visual) from diverse sources and perspectives. Our guest teachers (and the performances and exhibitions we see) invariably also come from and/or represent a broad range of cultural and geographical experiences, settings, and viewpoints.





2. CAST Courses

Fall 2024

Core Course

CAST 150B: Introduction to Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation. Toni Shapiro-Phim

Core Electives

ANTH 130B: Visuality and Culture, Patricia Alvarez Astacio

COML/ENG 191A: Environmental Aesthetics, Caren Irr

ENG 151B: Performance Studies, Thomas King

LGLS 129A: Transitional Justice: Global Justice and Societies in Transition, Melissa Stimell

NEJS 173A: Trauma and Violence in Israeli Literature and Film, Ilana Szobel

NEJS 184B: Disability Cultures: Art, Film and Literature of People with Disabilities, Ilana Szobel

THA 126A: Playing for Change - Community Building and Social Change on Stage, Jennifer Cleary

CAST Electives in Creative Arts

CAST 160A: Provocative Art: Outside the Comfort Zone. William Chalmus

Spring 2025

Core Course

CAST 140A: Theory and Praxis of Community Engagement, Toni Shapiro-Phim

Core Electives

CAST 110B: Dance and Migration. Toni Shapiro-Phim

ENG 143A: The History of Mediascapes and Critical Maker Culture, Dorothy Kim

ENG 169A: Eco-Writing Workshop, Elizabeth Bradfield

HISP 165B: The Storyteller: Short Fiction in Latin America, Fernando Rosenberg

MUS 3B: Global Soundscapes: Performing Musical Tradition Across Time and Place, Bradford Garvey

MUS 51A: Singing to Power, Taylor Ackley

THA 132A: Collaborative Creation, Adrienne Krstansky

THA 138B: Creative Pedagogy, Jennifer Cleary

CAST Electives in Creative Arts

CAST 160A: Provocative Art: Outside the Comfort Zone. William Chalmus





3. CAST Affiliated Faculty and Staff

CAST engages interdisciplinary arts, humanities, and social sciences at Brandeis while retaining its own distinct identity that emphasizes a rigorous study of power relations, conflict, and peace, and the dialogue between change agents, peacebuilders, and artists. The work is supported by Brandeis faculty and staff members from diverse fields.





Executive Committee

- Toni Shapiro-Phim, Chair, CAST; Director, Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, Assistant Director, Global Community Engagement at COMPACT
- Emilie Diouf, English and African and African American Studies
- Thomas King, English

Affiliates

- Cameron Anderson, Theater Arts
- Elizabeth Bradfield, English and Creative Writing
- Jennifer Cleary, Theater Arts
- Caren Irr, English
- Dorothy Kim, English
- Kristin Parker, Boston Public Library [Formerly at the Rose Art Museum]
- Fernando Rosenberg, Hispanic Studies, Comparative Literature
- David Sherman, English
- Faith Smith, English and Latin American, Caribbean and Latinx Studies, and African and African American Studies
- Ilana Szobel, Near Eastern and Judaic Studies
- Sabine von Mering, German, Russian and Asian Languages, and Environmental Studies, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies
- William Chalmus, CAST, Theatre Arts
- Taylor Ackley, Music

Staff

- Armine Avetisyan, Administrator
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4. Faculty and Staff Achievements



Toni Shapiro-Phim

- Her co-authored chapter, "Performance: A conversation between Iman Aoun and Toni Shapiro-Phim," was published in the book *Creating Justice: Human Rights and Art in Conversation* (Rowman and Littlefield) in January.
- Presented a paper, along with Phousita Huy, artistic director of the Angkor (Cambodian) Dance Troupe, at the World Music Symposium: Perspectives and Reflections on Teaching World Music in the 21st Century, at Northern Illinois University in April.
- Was awarded the Louis Dembitz Brandeis Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

William Chalmus

- Trained four Playback Theatre companies in Switzerland.
- Joined Cambridge base slam poetry team.
- Worked on the 10th cohort of educational leaders for the year-long certificate program.



Sabine von Mering

- Co-edited *The Routledge Handbook of Grassroots Climate Activism*.



Caren Irr

- Completed a fellowship in the plant humanities at Dumbarton Oaks and used a public humanities grant from the Mandel Center for Humanities to do archival research for her on-going project on rail trails.

Dorothy Kim

- Was awarded the inaugural Global Justice and Humanities Initiative grant by the Consortium for Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI).



Emilie Diouf

- Was awarded the inaugural Global Justice and Humanities Initiative grant by the Consortium for Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI).
- Received a Mass Humanities Grant with Africana Waltham to expand the digital community archive.
- Received 2025 COMPACT Heart of the Community Award.
- University of Illinois Press book contract for "Errant Voices: Violence and the Literary Making of African Women Refugees".



Thomas King

- Has been developing Urban Pastorals, a participatory project bringing together Somerville, MA-area residents in small acts of attending to, and tending, our shared ecosystems. Urban Pastorals aims to facilitate conversations among diverse Somerville residents by building awareness of our shared built and natural environments, reengaging the commons by joining together in community, and contributing responses – reflections, poetry, photography, sound, and other media – to an interactive online map of the city.
- Students in King's course ENG 151b, Performance Studies, in fall semester 2024 contributed to the ongoing Mapping Brandeis Project. The artist-scholars participating in The Mapping Brandeis Project invite visitors to the website to reflect on everyday and aesthetic performance practices as these are concretely situated in the spaces of the campus, and to begin imagining -- the first step toward bringing into being -- future ways of dwelling here.
- Contributed the essay "Performing Climate Justice" to The Routledge Handbook of Grassroots Climate Activism, co-edited by Sabine Von Mering et al.





Armine Avetisyan

- Was awarded the Louis and Helen Zirkel Award for significant contribution to the University.

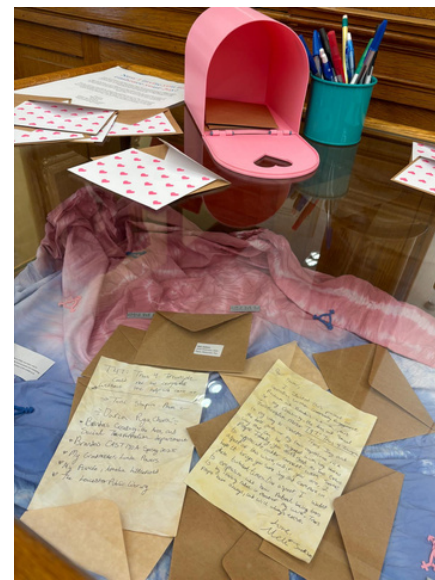
5. Student Projects




CAST students no longer undertake capstone projects, but they are encouraged to enroll in the new 4-credit “Theory and Praxis of Community Engagement” course. This Spring was the first time it was offered. Not all of the students were CAST minors. Below are examples of projects completed by some students in that class. All of the students involved were mentored by visiting artist-in-residence Daria Pugachova, a multi-media artist from Ukraine.



Meli Jackson (CAST UDR) prepared an installation highlighting their interpretations of T 4 T – love and solidarity within the trans community, and beyond. The installation was on the main floor of the public library in Meli’s hometown, a conservative-leaning town outside of Worcester, Massachusetts. Visitors left hand-written messages of self-encouragement in a heart-shaped mailbox.



Samin Jayaswal, Emily Moreno, Lily Roth, Devin Yuan, and Dylan Taub undertook a “That Should be Sustainable” effort during the Bernstein Festival of the Arts. The poster, cupcakes and song – lyrics by this group of students, sung by these students to the tune of One Direction’s “That’s What Makes You Beautiful” – drew other students to the table where they were offered the opportunity to sign a petition to restore the Office of Sustainability on campus. Samin, Emily et al tried to get an appointment with Interim President Levine in order to present the petition (which had been started earlier, by others), but were unsuccessful. Those who haven’t graduated will try again in the Fall.





Cameron Samuels, Leila Uwamungu Gasaro, and Sophia Berlinger hosted a “Let Them Read” event in Rapaporte Treasure Hall, with information about book bans across the U.S., and actions that people are taking and can take to counter them. The event included activities such as bookmark-making and storytime. During the latter, people read children’s books (each of which has been banned somewhere) aloud. Participants also wrote postcards to legislators which we mailed for them. Cameron had traveled to Washington, D.C., for the April Supreme Court hearing related to access to books. Their experience there, and learnings from that day, were incorporated into “Let Them Read.”



Gianna Crisha Saludo recruited students to join an International Students Club through which to address pressing issues. Dressed in a green “alien” costume, she walked around campus to attract interest and attention and then held information sessions at a table in the SCC – still dressed in the outfit.





6. Visiting Artists and Scholars in the Classroom

Distinguished artists and scholars visited CAST core and elective courses during the year, adding expertise and insight to class activities and discussions.

Fall 2024:

CAST 150B: Introduction to Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation

- Dr. Cynthia Cohen (oral history specialist)
- Fatu Gayflor (Liberian singer, dancer, and anti-violence activist)
- Claudia Bernardi (visual artist, Argentinian human rights activist)
- Professor William Chalmus (Will C) (slam and spoken word poet)
- Playback Theatre panel discussion with participants from Brazil, Lebanon, South Africa, and Ukraine, coordinated and facilitated by professor William Chalmus

Spring 2024:

CAST 140A: Theory and Praxis of Community Engagement


- Daria Pugachova (Ukrainian multi-media artist) mentored all students in this new course in the planning and production of their projects
- Emily Drabinski (former president of the American Library Association, on book bans)
- Andrea Bowers (artist, community justice activist with work at the Kniznick Gallery's Wrongs and RIGHTS exhibition)
- Professor Charlotte Powley (menstrual justice activist and scholar)



Distinguished artists and scholars visited CAST core and elective courses during the year, adding expertise and insight to class activities and discussions.

Spring 2024:

CAST: 110B: Dance and Migration

- Germaine Ingram (jazz tap choreographer, vocalist, cultural producer and writer)
 - Madusmita Bora (practitioner of Sattriya, a temple-based dance from Assam, India)
 - Sinta Penyami Storms (dancer and artistic director of Modero, Indonesian dance ensemble in Philadelphia, and immigrant rights activist)
 - Fatu Gayflor (Liberian singer, dancer, and anti-violence activist)
 - Dr. Hicham Chami (ethnomusicologist and specialist in Moroccan dance and music)
 - Phousita Huy, Brianna Mai, and Chummeng Soun (dancers and choreographers with Angkor [Cambodian] Dance Troupe in Lowell)
 - Venghour Than (dancer with Cambodia's only gay classical dance company)
 - Laura Hibbler (librarian and digital literacy specialist)
 - Dr. Juan Manuel Aldape Muñoz (scholar and professor of dance and migration related to the U.S./Mexico border)
 - Camila Cano (dancer with Jewish dance festival in Mexico)
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7. Events

2024–2025

CAST Graduation Ceremony

May 2, 2025

On May 2, 2025, the CAST community gathered to honor and celebrate its graduating seniors: **Tasha Epstein, Meli Jackson, Fiona Ripp, Lily Roth, Madison Sirois, and Jenny Wool.** The event featured a keynote address by Professor Sabine von Mering, Professor of German and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Director of the Center for German and European Studies, and a member of the program faculty in Environmental Studies. In her inspiring speech, Professor von Mering emphasized the urgent need for “creativity for social transformation” in today’s world, encouraging graduates to use their CAST training to fight for justice, freedom, and climate action with imagination, courage, and community. **[Read Prof. von Mering's full speech.](#)**





CAST co-sponsored a number of events.

Conversation with Camila Cano'

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April 7, 2025

Camila Cano '23 returned to campus to share her inspiring journey from Brandeis to leading social innovation work in Mexico City addressing gendered violence. In a dynamic conversation with students, she reflected on how her academic and co-curricular experiences shaped her path—and offered powerful insights for aspiring changemakers looking to turn bold ideas into impact.



Raka Maitra and Caroline **Chin/Contemporary Indian Dance** *November 18, 2024*

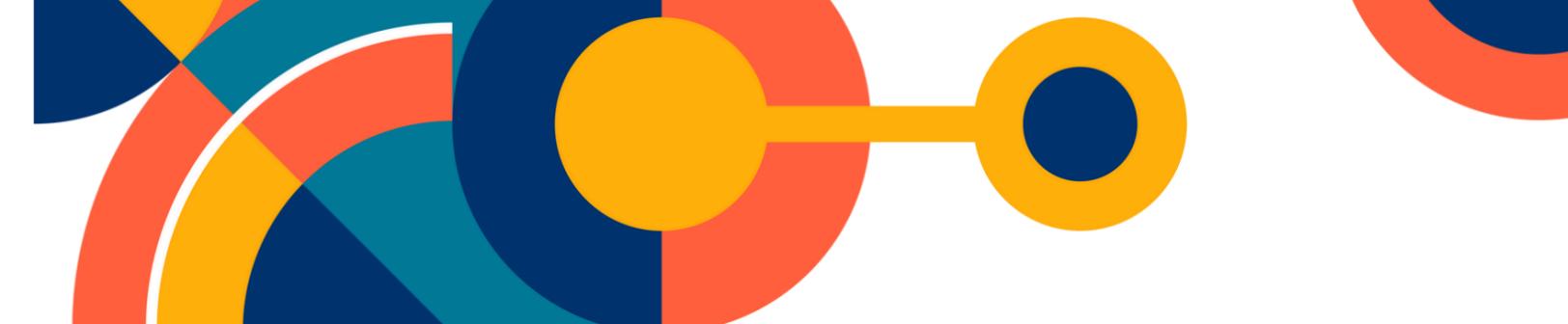
Dancer and choreographer Raka Maitra, the founder and artistic director of Chowk Productions, based in Singapore, taught a dance class on Sunday, November 17, hosted by Adagio Dance Club, and gave a guest lecture-presentation on Monday, November 18, in the anthropology class, "Contemporary South Asia," taught by Professor Brian Horton. Defying the conventional dichotomy of 'classical' and 'contemporary,' the basis of their movement is in both the martial arts (Chhau) and Odissi, a classical Indian dance.

Porcelain War

Documentary Screening
March 30, 2025

Under roaring fighting jets, Ukrainian artists Slava, Anya and Andrey stay behind, defiantly finding beauty amid destruction. Armed with art, cameras and for the first time in their lives, guns, they show that while it's easy to frighten people, it's harder to destroy their passion for living. Professor Katja Kolcio (Wesleyan) opened the event and Ukrainian multi-media artist Daria Pugachova closed it. Local Ukrainian non-profit organization Ukraine Forward participated, too.

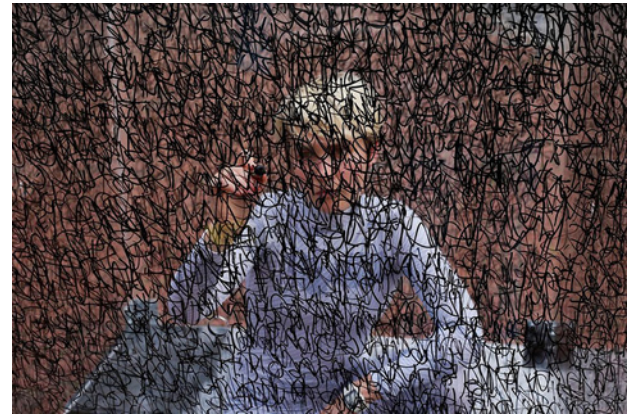




Art and Antiquities: Colonialism, War, Provenance, and Restitution

November 4, 2024

A stellar panel featured individuals with expertise in museums and provenance, the history of art, and law and philosophy, who discussed processes, policies, and promises and pitfalls related to the restitution of 'art' all over the world.



FREEDOM—FEAR—FREEDOM: Art of Transformation in Times of War & Conflict

November 12, 2024

Daria Pugachova, an interdisciplinary artist and art activist from Ukraine, presented her artistic practice to the Brandeis community. Her artistic approach prioritizes the presence of the artist and direct interaction with audiences in public spaces. Daria's work has been featured in exhibitions in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Germany, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States. Her latest projects are based on her experiences of war, exploring topics of freedom and limitation.

The Sundiata Epic: Griots, Words, Songs and Performance

October 9, 2024

Wassa Kouyaté and Balla Kouyaté, internationally renowned Malian traditional musicians, visited classes for three days. They are part of a Mande jaliw (generally known as the griots) – oral historians, musicians, and performers who keep alive and celebrate the history of the Mandé people of Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and other West African countries.

