

Creating Cultural Studies: The 2010 Capstone Conference

Abstracts

Name: Ballard, Trina

Abstract:

While there is a wide range of research on identity politics as well as research on involving amateur citizen scientists in order to broaden the reach and scope of inquiry into fieldwork, this project seeks to intersect the two subject areas by interrogating the production of the citizen scientist who determines to step into an activist role because of existing identification with a particular subculture: that of the surfer athlete. Using qualitative methods of ethnography and auto-ethnography while participating in an on-the-ground water sampling project, the study seeks to explain the productive relationship between the Surfrider Foundation and its surfer-activist membership.

This research explores how identity politics contributes to the shaping of the citizen activist, how organizations build constituencies, and how the roles of identity, culture, and community perform in building those relationships. In a related area, it investigates the recursive shaping of the activist relationship back toward the organization and why joining a particular identity-based constituency is meaningful for its participants. It also asks how participation in identity-based activism as citizen scientists shapes the ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of its members.

Ultimately this contributes to an understanding of how the role of identity-based political movements, intersecting with the activity of citizen science in contemporary advocacy, works in a variety of issues. Focusing on a specific site and the particular surfer subculture, the study examines the performance of science as a lay citizen through the “everyday practices” that build relationships between constituencies and organizations, the possibilities—and the limits—of these relationships and practices, and how participation provokes a re-imagining and transformation of people’s roles as political actors.

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Name: Courtmanch, Randi

Abstract:

This research explores the ways in which meaning is produced through art practices. The base of the research is a case study completed with a visual artist, Cristina, who bears the label of “developmentally disabled.” Through observation and video documentation I seek to unfold Cristina’s process and practice as an artist and how it enables her to create meaning for herself and others.

My research is comprised of two components. The first component is a paper, which layers ethnographic portraits of Cristina and her work with theoretical concepts around identity, sensibility, and the social construction of disability. Woven into the paper is an exploration into my practice and process as a dancer and new filmmaker and how that understanding and knowledge allows a way in which Cristina and I can collaborate and dialogue through our practices.

The second component of my research is a short experimental video that chronicles the time I spent with Cristina. The video is highly collaborative as we shot the footage together. Through dialogue, imagery, and music I seek to open up the ways in which I “sensed” Cristina during our time together. The video flows from the overarching space where she works, an adult day program specifically designed to facilitate artistic expression for adults with developmental disabilities, to the minutiae of her thoughts about her work and the ways in which life and art appear to blend seamlessly in the work she creates.

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Abstracts

Name: farris, salena

Abstract:

My paper is a methodology paper exploring the effectiveness of creative writing exercises for getting at identity formation and ways youth are doing politics. I begin with how I reacted to the exercises myself in order to form a prompts that would be most helpful in exploring identity, then look to how the session with the students went. While I believe this method is useful for multiple groups, I focus my efforts on members of high school Gay/Straight Alliances because I believe this particular group is at the forefront of radical youth politics and will open up new ways in which we think about how high school students navigate identity. Since most of the research on identity formation has used interviewing and/or surveying, much of what we know is relatively straight forward in terms of how people remember coming into their sexuality and whether or not their experiences have been positive or negative. While this has been valuable information, creative writing can get at some of the more complex and contradictory aspects of identity formation, as well as how these particular youth, those that are generally marginalized and invisible, are accessing resources at school and opening up discussions about gender and sexuality. In this way, they are confronting the myth of the “naturalness” of gender, queering campuses, and challenging narrow definitions of gender and sexuality in their everyday lives.

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Name: Ferreira, Rosemary

Abstract:

The main focus of this study evolved around the possibility of undue intrusions and surveillance of Indigenous tribes in Brazil by way of the "Muwaji Law." The Law was developed as a response to a confrontation between secular intellectuals and conservative Christians in and surrounding the Zuruwaha people of the Amazon. The confrontation led to the creation and distribution of a docudrama called "Hakani" that portrayed the Zuruwaha people committing acts of infanticide. Successively, after the dissemination of the film, the new "Muwaji Law" was introduced to the Brazilian legislature. The study was formulated around cultural activism taking place in civil society in favor of the new law. In this study the film and the practices surrounding it are used as an example of how a morally compelling argument can bewitch society into co-opting the imposition of a certain way of life. By striving for change, old discourses, stereotypes, assumptions, prejudices, and ideological biases, such as "manifest destiny" and "exceptionalism," are leading to the cultivation and the recasting of dominant ideology. Paradoxically, cultural activism originally a powerful tool in favor of the marginalized and the dispossessed, is being retooled, providing a continuity for hegemony in a revived form.

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Name: Heim, Joshua

Abstract:

This pilot study investigates the changing roles of homemakers in Uttarakhand, India as represented in discourses of sustainable development. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Kumaon Himalaya conducted in Summer 2009, this study takes up one form of sustainable development, ecotourism, and the various futures they propose for rural forest dwellers. For instance, one feature of ecotourism in Kumaon is the way in which cultural heritage informs economic development through the coupling of nature-adventure and the cultural experiences of home. Some civic leaders have turned to 'home-stay' programs and 'home-made' products as poverty-reducing strategies. In this way, this study is an exploration of my broader interests in dwelling and development, or the ways in which contemporary societies make space to feel 'at-home' in modernity. At interest here is how 'home' is used as a critical intervention in the lives of homemakers, and how homemakers become a critical intervention into and within the landscape. How have homemakers transformed the landscape, and how has the landscape transformed homemakers? This pilot study surveys the current interactions between symbolic and material modes of development across various sites and discourses whose common referent is the local landscape and the people who live there. I do this to understand the possibilities of launching a fuller engagement about these discourses that address a broader question: How has the changing role of homemakers changed the political possibilities of development in the Kumaon Himalaya? The result is a multimodal reflection of possible engagements around ecotourism with homemakers that include: creative nonfiction, museum studies, policy analysis, political ecology, textual analysis and urban planning. The significance of this approach is to open political possibilities for transnational collaboration around the use of natural resources in Kumaon through a range of intellectual and practical options.

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Name: Heuschkel, Valerie

Abstract:

Very little is written on the act of self pleasure, and how as young girls we process body pleasure and learn how to pleasure ourselves. As I started to research self pleasure, I was surprised to find very little written on the topic. I have yet to find a study that discusses the learned behavior of young girls and masturbation.

I will be having kitchen table conversations with a friend alone and also with our adult daughters looking for a history of learned behavior. What information is passed down from mother to daughter directly or indirectly?

My goal is to find areas of learned behavior and possible entrance points to begin creating dialogue with young girls about pleasure. In my passion for adolescent sexual health, I feel self pleasure is essential. For my pursuit to better educate young girls on sexual health and the ability to communicate their needs and desires in the future, masturbation is an important piece of the bigger issue.

My presentation will be my story through my capstone research, and a discussion on how valuable information can rise from non traditional research practices.

The final dissemination of my research will be a written auto ethnographic account of the process, data, and the theory that evolved throughout the interviews and analysis.

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Abstracts

Name: Macklin, Angelica

Abstract:

Using my capstone project as a framework, this presentation will examine the act of combining documentary filmmaking with critical theory in an effort to strengthen the practice of documentary filmmaking as a method of social and political advocacy. My capstone is a collaborative pilot documentary film that investigates how certain members of the community of Araçuaí, Brazil, have organized citizens toward civic engagement and cultural production over the past forty years. Along with my collaborators, Maria Lira and Geralda Soares, two cultural activists from Araçuaí, and Professor Jonathan Warren at the University of Washington, we are looking to understand and synthesize onto film how localized activism, coupled with external forces, has affected the social and political landscape of the town. We are also interested in the intersections of education, artisan production, and civic engagement as sites of struggle that serve to inform and involve residents of Araçuaí in the process of building a sustainable community based on human security. Our collective believes this project has important lessons for those seeking similar models of development that measure success based on social wellbeing. The particular site of Araçuaí offers a rich setting in which to document and produce a specific, historically significant, story of a number of influential activists who have committed their lives toward social development. I am also documenting this story to better understand how the medium of film, and specifically certain methods and processes of film production, can produce knowledge that is useful for furthering the political agendas of the cultural activists with whom I work. My presentation will discuss both these aspects of my work and will include a short clip from my current capstone documentary.

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Name: MacTavish-Unten, Joy

Abstract:

This pilot research project focuses on the question of how mixed-race LGBTQ families within the Seattle metropolitan area develop strategies and support systems. In recent years there has been an increase in the academic and community-based work on the topics of LGBTQ families and mixed-race families, but not always on the intersection of the two. While these families may be underrepresented, there are many insights that can be gained regarding personal and familial identity, location and creation of support systems. Using a feminist cultural studies analysis of textual materials and ethnographic interviews with adult members of mixed-race and LGBTQ families, this project recognizes these families that exist at the intersection between race and sexuality. This research foregrounds the experiences of these families in relation to topics of race, sexual orientation and family creation. My ethnography was driven by questions related to the ways in which personal strategies, resources and support systems aid in navigating the challenges of multiple forms of oppression--primarily racism and homophobia. In order to gain a greater understanding of how the decision-making and experiences of mixed-race LGBTQ are tied to anti-oppressive strategies and support systems, focus is placed on the unique characteristics and life paths' of this group. The result is an embedding of the ethnographic components of this research in order to show the current theoretical and practical intersections between anti-oppressive activism, community-building and resource creation as well as proposing larger-scale projects that could be pursued in the future.

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Name: Nelson, Christine

Abstract:

Racism is still prominent in our society, yet it has become more sophisticated and easily overlooked or ignored (Wise 2009, Vaught and Castagno 2008, Tochluk 2008, Lipsitz 1998). White privilege theory shows that too many have turned a blind eye toward reflecting on what their whiteness affords them and how it impacts interracial and cross-cultural relationships (Wise 2009, Tochluk 2008, Lipsitz 1998, Tatum 2007). I address these theories by focusing on the idea that “people always have the option of becoming anti-racist, although not enough have done so. We do not choose our color, but we choose our commitments” (Lipsitz, pg. viii). Through reflecting on my experiences of becoming a diversity worker and community collaborator, I consider how I and other white educators can improve the quality and effectiveness of diversity work. I reflect on the path I have taken and how it led to my current position; the difficulties I encountered; and the knowledge I have gained. I highlight the need to approach relationships through valuing, listening to and respecting one another, regardless of social categories. Through critical analysis of my experiences as a diversity worker, I engage multiple layers of social identity. My hope is that my reflection may be used to generate dialogue that will bring about greater social justice.

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Name: Pratt, Tyler

Abstract:

This project is an intervention into the soundscape of Lake City- a neighborhood in northeast Seattle. In response to universalistic and exclusionary notions of the meaning of community, a backlash against community has emerged that sees community as an unproductive, and potentially harmful, rhetorical tool. Challenging both uncritical understandings of, and dismissive responses to, community this project engages marginalized voices in rethinking where and how community meanings are actually produced. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's provocation to focus on the tactical practices of everyday life and Diana Taylor's insistence on the power repertoire as a site of knowledge production, I attempt to draw attention to the ways that community meanings are continually being produced through the everyday actions and interactions of community inhabitants. Frustrated by the tendency of communities to define "undesirable" residents as outsiders, this project highlights the voices and everyday performances of some of Lake City's homeless residents in order to trouble the assumptions about who does and does not belong in community.

Comprising both a written analysis and an audio composition, this project developed over the last year and a half in relationship with a homeless drop in site known as God's Little Acre (GLA). Collaborating in the construction of a more inclusive Lake City community, and inspired by the reimagining of community taking place at GLA, this project uses sound recording to engage with the meaning of community for its potential to capture the everyday performances of even the most marginalized community residents. Beyond reimagining community in Lake City, this project serves to exemplify the potential of the soundscape to capture the everyday performances that too often go unnoticed, and promotes the use of alternative research methods to capture a greater diversity of data.

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Name: Richards, Jeremy

Abstract:

Over a century after Friedrich Nietzsche's death, his influence still pervades intellectual and popular culture, from Freud and Foucault to Kanye West and Little Miss Sunshine. Beyond a cultural residue, however, remains the question of Nietzsche's impact on, and reputation in, the public consciousness. An aesthetic attack can transcend the obvious: How did Nietzsche grapple with nihilism? Why did he pronounce God dead? What led to his erroneous association with National Socialism? Naive on the surface, these questions reveal their complexity when given room to breathe. They speak not to the fundamental question of this proposal, but to the ancillary concerns of reception, the give and take of audience, and the chimeric iterations of cultural cache. After over a century of refuting, debating, co-opting, and attempting to redeem Nietzsche, the wider knowledge of his work still stumbles over misinterpretation and misrepresentation. The question that upsets the spirit of gravity, then, is a high concept: What is the dramatic potential of Friedrich Nietzsche? Enter Nietzsche! The Musical.

After a 5 minute video from the production of the musical, this presentation will focus on the questions provoked for the audience of the show and their reactions in the talk back: What guides our morality? What is the role or absence of religion or spirituality in our lives? How do the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves bridge or widen the gulf between intention and effect? Musical theater demands emotional answers to these questions. Allen Cohen and Steven Rosenhaus insist that this emotion rises from three categories of conflict. But more than "man against nature" and "man against man," "the most powerful or touching moments in drama (and often the funniest as well) come from the third type, a single soul in conflict with itself." Hence, the chaos of this play will swirl around that controlling element of self-reflexive agon, pushed to the limits of absurdity and song.

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Abstracts

Name: Simonelli, Faith

Abstract:

Cultural Identity in Children within Shifting Cultural Boundaries

Children whose families are recent immigrants to the U.S. participate in multiple communities with distinct cultural heritages (Rogoff, 2003, pg 25). Developmental researchers have found that when these children are encouraged to understand the dynamics among their communities, to value their background, and to be able to function in two or more cultural communities they are more successful and confident than children that do not (Rogoff, 2003, p 330; Carrasquillo, 1991). However, bilingualism is often seen as 'un-American' and a deficit to learning (Bernal, 2002, 112). In this presentation, I will share an evaluation project that explores children's biculturalism in the context of a children's museum in the Pacific Northwest during a three-week summer day camp for 25 Hispanic/Latino children age 6-12. The camp's primary goals are to help improve English, make the children feel more community oriented, and to instill hope in these children. The research consists of interviewing the teachers, parents and campers, along with participatory observation for the period of the camp experience. I hope that my research findings will be used to broaden perspectives of the growing number of cultural communities that exist in this community, along with how children are coping while living within shifting cultural domains. I hope the findings will also provide educators and staff of the museum a perspective of those that are using and benefiting from such the program. My goal with this is to increase civic dialogue within the community at large, provide the children's museum the necessary organizational data to improve cultural competency, along with giving these children a voice.

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Abstracts

Name: Swift, Jayne

Abstract:

My Capstone, "Hot for Teacher: Sex Work and Academic Spaces," explores the question of how those who might be deemed "sex workers," (or their allies) became the leading forces in the academic production of knowledge about sex work. By this I mean, that my Capstone traces how, until very recently, academic or intellectual knowledge about sex work was produced largely by those with no ties to the work and how this has changed in recent decades. Indeed, until very recently academic knowledge about sex work by sex workers was a historical impossibility. However, now sex working-academics are a common enough occurrence that it can be parodied as a stereotype in multiple cultural outlets. In order to explicate this "historic impossibility," my Capstone involves a meta-level critical exploration of a body of work I am calling "sex work studies," and oral histories with those who I consider leaders in the field of sex work studies. My Capstone takes a historiographical approach to the growth of literature about sex work by those who have worked in the field; in order to ask how it has come into being and how it alters the academic study of sex workers lives. In particular, I pay attention to the ways in which the social category of "sex worker" is mobilized by contemporary academic work about commercial sex cultures. Second, I use oral histories to elucidate how individuals have lived the interstices of sex and academic spaces. In doing this, I aim to point to the challenges and possibilities for sex worker inclusion within academic spaces.

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Name: Thompson, Myrella

Abstract:

My capstone project asks, "What is embodied knowledge?" The human body is a repository of knowledge that is a precursor to conceptual knowledge and language. It is an innate and felt knowledge that is present in every thing that we do, say and think. Embodied knowledge can provide us with information and guidance both consciously and subconsciously, however, most westerners are unaware of how it affects their everyday lives, and are even less aware of how to consciously employ it.

Cultural Studies practitioners have experimented with artistic practices, and cultural studies scholars have also explored questions about the nature of knowledge. Embodied knowledge is central to both of these explorations, however, research regarding the forms and functions of embodied knowledge is still lacking.

This presentation will explore how humans understand themselves and their world through the body, in order to begin to define embodied knowledge. What are the forms of embodied knowledge and what is its function? I will be discussing some theories about the nature of human experience. I will be drawing from philosophy, movement studies and psychology in order to support my own theory that qualitative patterns, or rhythms, are essential to how humans understand themselves and their world.

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Abstracts

Name: Williams, Alan

Abstract:

Mormon culture takes a “love the sinner, hate the sin” approach to queerness by upholding “essential heterosexuality for all” under a rubric of “eternal gender.” Using the work of queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, this paper looks at the practice of the Church in both policy and social services, arguing that a framework of “mercy/wrath” contradictorily maintains the culture’s heteronormative structure: idealized heterosexual marriage and reproduction. This paper also presents a case study of the themes and reception of the 2004 book *In Quiet Desperation*, a signpost of some queer Mormons have successfully negotiated questions of identity and soteriology and still remain in good standing with the Church. Finally, this paper compares the themes and reception of two very different 2009 “gay Mormon” novels, *No Going Back* by Jonathan Langford and *Ockham’s Razor* by Alan Williams (the researcher), as demonstrative of “queer religion” and the effects religious thinking can have on queer identification and disidentification.