

COVER PAGE

Final Performance Report

Award Number: Grant AB-50019-07

Reeling Them In: Invigorating the Humanities Through Film At Two Texas
Historically Black Colleges

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Award Recipient: Prairie View A&M University

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Project Overview

This project (1) supported collaborative work among faculty members in History, Political Science, Spanish, English, and Philosophy, (2) helped us to develop a new humanities area of study in film, (3) facilitated teaching in this area by bringing experts on film and the humanities to campus, and (4) aided us in overcoming one of our biggest hurdles to incorporating film and television successfully into our classrooms: film acquisition for faculty and our campus libraries. The objective of this project was to invigorate the humanities through the creation and implementation of a number of courses geared specifically toward the study of film and to infuse select existing courses with film (either throughout the course or through full film units). This project has met or exceeded expectations and goals.

Specific Project Activities

In May of 2007, seventeen faculty from two universities collaborated during a week-long workshop on how to use and incorporate film into their courses (see workshop syllabus, Appendix pp.1-6). After introductions and an initial written survey was completed by each participant, we had a day of training and discussion of film and film texts ranging from the theoretical, practical, and historical to the pedagogical. We discussed ways to incorporate film across the curriculum, examined what courses to develop, and filled out a second survey to help guide workshops with our consultants. During the week, we brought in film experts Drs. Lorraine Stock, Kimberly Brown, and Patricia Hart. These consultants demonstrated how to use film, ways to discuss film clips with students, how to teach themes and misconceptions regarding history, race, and master narratives, and they each shared sample syllabi, assignments, filmographies, and bibliographies, most of which were printed in our near 200-page workshop packet of materials distributed on day one of the workshop.

The one change that had to be made to our workshop was the inclusion of Dr. Patricia Hart as a substitute for historian Dr. Steven Mintz. His move to Stanford and inability to serve as a consultant made us contact Drs. Randy Roberts from Purdue and Robert Toplin from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, both of whom have written extensively on Hollywood's portrayal of history. Neither were available. Tom Adams from NEH was consulted, and Gladstone Yearwood was mentioned as a replacement, but since Dr. Brown was already covering the Black aesthetic, we felt it best to move toward Latin American history and culture on film. We, therefore, brought in Hart, whose c.v. was forwarded to Tom Adams, and positioned Dr. Stock to address history more than was originally proposed.

On the last day of the week-long workshop, faculty met specifically to apply what they had learned to a set of film clips designed by Dr. Sarah Wakefield. Meeting in groups by discipline, we then began the difficult process of designing course titles and descriptions, finally sharing and revising descriptions as all workshop participants came together at the end of the day. We discussed the difficulties of proposing too many new courses given our lack of faculty and high teaching loads and the need to properly rotate courses already in our campus catalogs. The workshop was evaluated at the end and suggestions were made for our one-day follow-up workshop. Before leaving, faculty volunteered to lead one monthly film forum when the Fall semester began. These film forums examined film texts on areas important to our campuses: Latin American cinema, Shakespeare, African American film and race, and American history on film.

Over the summer of 2007, faculty worked on their syllabi (either for new courses or on existing ones that could be infused with film units). They researched films available using the

filmographies and six film texts distributed to each participant at the workshop, and the resources pointed out by our consultants. Although we had planned for our follow-up workshop to take place three months later, in August of 2007, collectively the group felt that a day set aside in May of 2008, a year later, would work better to discuss progress and accomplishments. Doing so also allowed faculty to meet over the year at monthly forums and to better prepare for teaching with film. This change in final workshop date was an effective one. Held May 21, 2008, the workshop featured a full length film (*Letters From Iwo Jima*), something recommended by evaluations of the workshop. We applied what we had learned over the year, discussed our film texts on African-American and Shakespeare on film, reviewed film acquisitions available on both campuses (see lists, Appendix pp. 9-16; 74-83), and reported challenges and accomplishments for the year. Comments on the film ranged from the technical and cinematographic to the historical and directorial. Each and every participant was engaged in the very activity in which we now engage our students. The final workshop, therefore, worked extremely well, bringing together the themes we had examined over the year and proving that we were ready to offer courses in an area that was new to most of us just a year before. The final workshop also looked forward to the ways we would continue the project in spite of its conclusion.

Aside from postponing the final workshop day until the close of the academic year, we also found that we needed to postpone two of the seven monthly film forums (both at the end of the Spring semester). Professors Donna Kilgore-Kimble and Carry Winz (TSU) and Professor Tonya Scott (PVAMU) were to lead the February forum on *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now* and Professor Rita Saylor (TSU) and Professor James Palmer (PVAMU) were to lead March's forum on the text *Shakespeare on Film*. Faculty on both campuses were overwhelmed with their four-four teaching loads and new SACS Assessment duties, so the discussion of these texts were held for the final workshop held in May. Doing so did not compromise the outcomes of the project, since the forums were on track for most of the year, and faculty at TSU even presented on these texts on their campus at the yearly weeklong research symposium in March for faculty and students. We were able to keep on schedule largely due to the high degree of excitement stemming from the week-long workshop in 2007 and the research activities taking place in the summer of 2007 as we went into the film forums in the Fall. Dr. Alfredo Fernandez' powerpoint presentation, for example, on the first text we studied together *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* led to superb discussion not only of Latin America film but of how it related to the history of Hollywood cinema and to the ways smaller filmmakers world wide challenge Hollywood's portrayal of their cultures and traditions (see Fernandez' film forum handout, Appendix pp. 18-28).

Accomplishments

Aside from the activities noted above, during the tenure of the grant, faculty in various disciplines of the humanities at Prairie View A&M University successfully defended new courses before departmental curriculum committees, university wide task force committees, and ultimately before the University Academic Council. Final ratification of courses is made by the Texas A&M University System's Board of Regents. Three new courses designed entirely around film included: ENGL 2303 Introduction to Film; SPAN 3303 Hispanic American Film; and POSC 3313 Political Studies through Film (see Course Inventory Update forms for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, supporting documents, and new syllabi, Appendix pp. 29-61). These courses will be included in the new 2008-2010 catalog in the Fall. Two of these courses were offered for the first time this Spring, and the response by students, faculty and administrators has been positive. One student even wrote about his new Spanish film class for the campus newspaper (see *Panther* article, Appendix p. 101). Several courses have been infused with film units or revolve around media studies; see especially Kevin Daniels's acquisitions for his Freshman Composition I course, which is to be included in a Learning Community in the Fall

of 2008, and which is being developed over the summer after he attends a learning community summit at Johnson C. Smith University.

At Texas Southern University, a course that had not been offered in over ten years was resurrected in the English department: English 241 Studies in Literature and Film. Previously using film merely to introduce plot, the course now teaches students to analyze film as a text, comparing and contrasting the narrative methods of film and genres such as short story and novel. Furthermore, the traditional Shakespeare class at TSU (as well as at PVAMU) has become a Shakespeare on Film course, though our courses still emphasize in-depth readings of original plays. Dr. Haiqing Sun at TSU developed Spanish 441 “The Reel World”: Latin American Culture through Film and infused another regularly taught course with film, Spanish 444: Obras Maestras de la Literatura Hispana (see TSU syllabi, Appendix pp. 84-100).

Faculty on both campuses infused courses with film analysis or found ways to offer film courses under existing Special Topics titles, for example. Courses designed include: SOCG 3223 Political Sociology and Film, and CRJS 1134 The Criminal Justice System through Film (see syllabi, Appendix pp. 62-72). To facilitate teaching with film, our lists of films acquired through grant funding are available to participants and all members of our departments. These lists have been sent electronically and are on file with departmental administrative staff for consultation. The front and back cover of each film has been photocopied, and these remain in a 4-inch binder for consultation. Furthermore, Texas Southern University’s Library and Dr. Haiqing Sun were fortunate enough to acquire a small Humanities Texas Grant in the Spring of 2008 for slightly over \$1,000 to host a film festival on the Afro-Hispanic Diaspora with Cuban film maker Gilberto Martinez.

Audiences

Texas Southern and Prairie View A&M Universities are similar Historically Black Universities: both have between 8,000 and 9,000 students, 90% of which are native Texans and African American, both universities serve the south-eastern region of Texas, have largely what amounts to an open-admissions policy, and have graduation rates well below most Texas universities (Texas Southern University at 19.4%; Prairie View A&M University at 37.1%, compared to Texas A&M University at 75.2% and University of Texas-Austin at 70.5%, according to *The Education Trust*). This project was aimed at increasing the interest of our students in a new area of the humanities and to “reel them in” through their interest in film and media. It was also aimed at helping faculty to teach in this area.

Given the faculty and student support for new courses, we have reached our audience. Indeed, the Department of Music and Drama at PVAMU has asked that we offer our new ENGL 2303 Introduction to Film course every semester, noting that they could guarantee nearly ten students each term. Furthermore, as noted above, a student was so pleased at finding a new Spanish course offered in the Spring semester (SPAN 3303 Hispanic American Film) that he wrote a newspaper article about it and his experience (Appendix p. 101). Furthermore, these courses reach more than our own majors. ENGL 241 Studies in Literature and Film at TSU and ENGL 2303 Introduction to Film at PVAMU both satisfy the core humanities option for students. The majors represented in the ENGL 2303 course this Spring, for example, included: History, Criminal Justice, Human Performance, Drama, English, Biology, Communications, Curriculum and Instruction, and Marketing. These students were enrolled, in large part, due to the advertising for this course across campus, since new courses and their descriptions are not in the current catalog.

Letters from Dr. Sun and the Dean of Arts and Sciences at TSU also point to the impact on our audience (see letters, Appendix pp. 102-03). The faculty involved in the project included:

Kenneth Howell	History	Prairie View A&M University
James Jones	History	Prairie View A&M University
Cary Wintz	History	Texas Southern University
Michael Nojeim	Political Science	Prairie View A&M University
Arbolina Jennings	English	Texas Southern University
Donna Kilgore-Kimble	English	Texas Southern University
Rita Saylor	English	Texas Southern University
Kevin Daniels	English	Prairie View A&M University
James Palmer	English	Prairie View A&M University
Sarah Wakefield	English	Prairie View A&M University
Tonya Scott	English	Prairie View A&M University
Diljit Chatha	English	Prairie View A&M University
Ymitri Mathison	English	Prairie View A&M University
Jackie Burns	Sociology	Prairie View A&M University
Harry Adams	Philosophy	Prairie View A&M University
Haiqing Sun	Spanish	Texas Southern University
Alfredo Fernandez	Spanish	Prairie View A&M University

Evaluation

Our film workshop was evaluated using a seventeen-question survey. The first thirteen questions asked participants to respond using “Completely, Mostly, Fair, and Insufficient”. The last four questions were open-ended, asking such questions as: What information would you like to see included as a follow-up to this workshop? Which consultant was most beneficial for you and your teaching and why? Etc.

Although questions such as “Were the coordinators (Drs. Palmer, Sun, and Wakefield) helpful and prepared for this workshop?” “Did the consultants clearly demonstrate their use of film in the classroom?” and “Was this workshop as collaborative as you had expected?” received the highest possible rating by seventeen of seventeen participants, other questions did not. Not all participants felt, for example, that the six texts distributed on day one of the workshop were as helpful as they needed to be to begin teaching with film. Although twelve said “completely,” four answered “mostly” and one answered “fair”. Although we attempted to be as interdisciplinary as possible with our selections, areas such as philosophy and political science were not as represented in our text selections and might explain the range of answers to this question. We made sure to focus more on history and culture in our film forum discussion as a result of this particular evaluation. By way of conclusion, sixteen participants noted that the workshop “completely” accomplished its purpose, while one answered “mostly.” The range of consultants listed as being the most beneficial for teaching reflected our success at working with a diverse group of faculty and disciplines of study during the workshop. Drs. Hart, Stock, and Brown, each received about the same number of “votes,” with reasons given such as: “because her area of teaching is the same as mine,” “because of her interaction with participants and her sample discussion,” “for her teaching and technical ideas,” and “she showed how film could be used in a variety of courses,” among others.

The subcontract “deliverables table” also helped us evaluate our progress on the grant, and worked to end the subcontract on time (see benchmarks table, Appendix p. 104). Student opinion surveys were another method of evaluation. Since the semester just ended, however, these will not be available until the Fall. A request for this data has been placed with Anthony Adams of Institutional Research.

Continuation

As a result of this project, faculty have 1) developed skills needed to teach with film, 2) created syllabi or film units for existing courses, 3) selected films to use, and 4) created film clips or selected film scenes for use in the classroom. Some faculty have already offered film courses. New course titles and descriptions have been made sufficiently broad to allow various faculty to offer courses in a variety of areas in the future. We have made clear that no one “owns” the courses created and that films acquired through the grant belong to our departments, not to individuals. Therefore, given the creation of broad titles for courses, faculty members offering these courses continually rotate, providing various humanities topics years after grant funding has ended.

Participants can also call upon our consultants for advice and input as our film curriculum continues to develop over the years. Given the experiences of Lorraine Stock and Kimberly Brown, growth in the humanities is an inevitable result of new film courses; therefore, this humanities project has great educational potential beyond the defined funding period. Indeed, there has already been discussion among English and University College faculty regarding the design of learning communities revolving around film as a theme. Professors Kevin Daniels and Tonya Scott are developing courses this summer using the films acquired for these learning communities (see film acquisition documents, Appendix pp. 9-16; 74-83). University College would like us to expand our learning communities to involve a history and political science course by the fall of 2009.

PVAMU and TSU both have had considerable “buy in” on the part of their libraries. As noted, the TSU library acquired a grant for over \$1,000 from Humanities Texas to offer a film series and lecture on the Afro-Hispanic Diaspora, and the PVAMU library purchased nearly \$3,000 in film for Dr. Jackie Burns for her class in Political Sociology and Film (Appendix, pp. 62-67). This generous support was a near matching of our \$2,800 in films donated to the library.

Long Term Impact

The long-term impact of this project is directly related to the continuation of the project noted above. Learning communities are being developed, broad course titles ensure different faculty from a discipline can teach in their area of expertise, and recently PVAMU “reeled in” a new faculty member for the fall semester from the University of Oregon whose specialty is Caribbean film and literature. Indeed, his dissertation is entirely dedicated to film, and he would like to develop a course on this topic for our senior-level capstone for the Spring of 2009. Also, as we graduate more media savvy students, we will see those students make their way into classrooms of their own and infuse theirs with media more effectively than before.

Products

Included in the appendix are sample syllabi, sample supporting documents for the UAC council for approval of new courses, workshop syllabus, lists of films purchased for faculty on both campuses, and other items. Our new university catalog at PVAMU will be available in October of 2008 and will include our new courses. Other products include a binder with photocopies of each film purchased, which facilitates check-out by faculty. Furthermore, Dr. Palmer organized a session at SCMLA in 2007 on “Shakespeare on Film and World Stage” to examine how Shakespeare offers insight on cultural diversity through filmic adaptations. This session was well attended and had presenters from Canada, India, and the United States. Dr. Sun from TSU has organized a session on “Cultural Studies” for the SCMLA in 2008 aimed at examining filmic and literary works made in third-world countries that contribute to our understanding of the costs of progress and the distinctions between the civilized and the barbarian.