Three Public Programs in April Explore Religion, Revolution, and Sacrifice

April is the busiest and richest month in the Humanities Institute’s eight-year history of creating public humanities and community partnership programs around issues of broad civic and intellectual interest. Over a period of thirty-five days, the Institute will co-sponsor three multi-part programs, each encompassing four to six public events, and all revolving around artistic representations and personal experiences of religious and political upheaval, struggle, and suffering.

As a counterpart and prelude to the Austin Lyric Opera’s production of Francis Poulenc’s Dialogues of the Carmelites (which will be performed on April 18, 22, 24, and 26), the HI and the ALO have worked together to create a four-part symposium that offers Austinites a musical and intellectual introduction to Poulenc’s operatic masterpiece and an opportunity to explore its timely themes of political and religious conflict, faith and fear, honor and martyrdom. At the same time, HI faculty affiliates in Middle Eastern Studies, Jewish Studies, and American literature will be leading free public discussions across the city of Austin’s 2009 Mayor’s Book Club selection: Iranian American writer Dalia Sofer’s award-winning The Septembers of Shiraz, a novel based on the experience of the author’s family as Iranian Jews caught up in the 1979 revolution against the Shah. Finally, from April 26 to May 1, the Humanities Institute and the Center for Women’s and Gender Studies will sponsor the week-long campus residency of Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian attorney and women’s and children’s rights activist. Dr. Ebadi’s visit will include a public lecture, a BookPeople reading and signing of her memoir Iran Awakening, and roundtable discussions with leading scholars on international human rights challenges and the future of U. S.-Iranian relations. The featured events of all three of these April programs are free and open to the public.

Together, the opera symposium, citywide book club, and Ebadi residency programs feature Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities at moments of great stress and violence—moments that also present occasions for great courage and insight. Set in a besieged convent during the French Revolution, Poulenc’s opera asks what are our core beliefs and what would we dare or sacrifice to defend them. Sofer’s novel traces the physical and psychic dislocations of a Jewish family in Tehran when the father, Isaac, is arrested, imprisoned, and interrogated by the revolutionary regime—an event that also compels his wife and two children to re-examine their prosperity, their Judaism, and their political and personal allegiances. Ebadi’s Iran Awakening: One Woman’s Journey to Reclaim her Life and Country is a challenging and moving personal account of Ebadi’s own persecution by the mullahs.

* please see Religion, Revolution, and Sacrifice, page 6
This thirteenth issue of The Citizen-Scholar will very likely be the last that I oversee as Humanities Institute director. As it goes to press, a search is underway that I hope will yield a dynamic new leader for the Institute, one who will navigate the tricky but critical passage of any young venture from start-up to going concern. He or she will take on a greater challenge than mine was; it is easier to begin than to sustain, develop, and secure.

The launch of the Humanities Institute eight years ago marked a new beginning for me, as scholar and as citizen. Over my first two decades here at UT, my intellectual and social circle was centered in my home discipline of literary studies. Rich and capacious as this circle was and is, the lesson of Emerson’s “Circles” remained in force: “it is the inert effort of each thought having formed itself into a circular wave of circumstance—as, for instance, an empire, rules of an art, a local usage, a religious rite, [or an academic discipline]—to heap itself on that ridge, and to solidify, and hem in the life.” Emerson (joined, in my view, by the trans-disciplinary, extra-disciplinary, and even in some respects anti-disciplinary energies and aspirations of “the humanities”) teaches that “there is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us,” and that the refreshment of our understanding and our power, both as citizens and as scholars, sometimes depends on drawing “a circle around the circle we had just pronounced the outline of the sphere.” The Humanities Institute has given me an opportunity to spend my third decade at UT enlarging my professional and my civic circumference, and for that I am truly grateful.

In the third week of the Humanities Institute’s existence, the twin towers fell. On the Thursday of that week, at the meeting of the HI faculty seminar (organized, that first year, around the theme, “The Future of Disciplinary Knowledges”), I suggested to my colleagues that perhaps, at this moment of confusion and fear, we ought to organize a symposium to share with interested members of the general public some of the UT faculty’s vast and varied knowledge of the world beyond America’s borders and of the ways that people in other countries were understanding and responding to 9/11 through their historical, cultural, and experiential prisms. The idea was received with equal parts apprehension and approval, which I took as a mandate. My institutional rationale for pressing forward was simple: if we didn’t, who would? If, at a moment of universal interest and inquiry, it was not the Humanities Institute’s job to make the university accessible and responsive to its largest constituency by seeking to bridge the divide between academic and non-academic spheres of knowledge and practice, whose job was it? The symposium a few weeks later was attended by close to four hundred people.

This same rationale has governed Humanities Institute program and partnership development ever since. It has prompted our citywide life-writing campaign and published collection Writing Austin’s Lives; our programmatic collaborations with organizations ranging from the Austin Public Library to the Austin Lyric Opera to Foundation Communities to Austin Area Interreligious Ministries to Austin Community College; our establishment of a flex-time research sabbatical on the UT campus for employees of area nonprofits; our launch of the Free Minds Project to reconnect economically and educationally underserved Austin adults with intellectual community and the possibility of academic advancement; and, most recently, our instigation of a campus consortium that is re-conceiving and redesigning the “Community Outreach” portal on the UT web site.

The Humanities Institute is the least circumscribed unit on campus and the least constrained from assuming the role of intellectual rapid responder to any opportunity to bring people together to explore and address meaningful human challenges. This is the Institute’s source of strength and of vulnerability. We are minister without portfolio. We are a unit that is anchored neither by student credit hours nor by permanent faculty lines nor by Title VI funding nor by the identity politics interests of alumni or other demographic groups in Texas. Humanity is everyone’s and no one’s primary identity affiliation.

Economic retrenchment in an institution or a polity often drives and justifies retrenchment of vision as well, a circling of wagons around what are deemed to be core assets and functions. A critical challenge for my successor will be to make the case that forging intellectual and civic community within, across, and beyond the University’s walls is a function and an asset that falls within this circle. Or to draw a new one.
The Humanities Institute is pleased to announce a new collaboration with the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs that will support the growth of the Community Sabbatical program. The RGK Center will sponsor an additional Community Sabbatical grantee for the academic year 2009-10, raising the number of annually funded community research grants from three to four.

The new partnership is a logical fit because of the Humanities Institute's and the RGK Center's mutual interest in nurturing central Texas nonprofit organizations and promoting interdisciplinary research and dialogue. The mission of the RGK Center is to build knowledge about nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, and volunteerism, and to prepare students and practitioners to make effective contributions to their communities. The center supports the nonprofit sector through several education and outreach initiatives that promote the study of policies and practices affecting nonprofits.

"Over its first four years," says Humanities Institute Director, Evan Carton, "the Community Sabbatical Research Leave has been an exceptional success, producing new knowledge and seeding new programs that have helped Austin-area nonprofits better serve their constituencies. At the same time, it has forged new intellectual collaborations between the university and the nonprofit world that have enriched both. The RGK Center’s partnership with us in this effort brings a wealth of expertise, as well as additional resources, to the table." Peter Frumkin, Director of the RGK Center says, "This is a wonderful opportunity for nonprofit leaders to connect with the university and to work on an issue that could propel their organization to the next level of effectiveness."

The Community Sabbatical Research Leave Program enables directors and staff members of Central Texas 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations to apply to the University for paid flexible leave in order to pursue a question or problem related to their organization and its constituency. While the RGK-sponsored grantee’s research must focus in particular on a topic related to non-profit capacity-building and management, the other grantees’ projects can be more broadly focused on the organization’s client services.

Community Sabbatical grantees receive access to UT libraries and research databases and a $2500-$5000 stipend. Grantees also are matched with University faculty members with related interests who provide assistance and consultation on the proposed project.

Community Sabbatical Program

Applications for the 2009-10 Community Sabbatical program are due no later than May 29.

Applications can be downloaded from the Humanities Institute's web site at:
http://www.humanitiesinstitute.utexas.edu/programs/sabbatical/

Independent scholars whose projects are not affiliated with a non-profit organization may be interested in our Research Associate program.

For more information, please contact Program Coordinator Gretchen Voter Abbott at: community@humanitiesinstitute.utexas.edu.
Faculty Fellows Selected for 2009-‘10 HI Seminar:

Intellectual Life at Moments of Crisis

Twenty-three University of Texas faculty members, representing fifteen different departments and programs across campus, have been selected as 2009-10 Humanities Institute Faculty Fellows. HI faculty fellowships offer one of the few formal opportunities on campus for sustained intellectual collaboration and community-building across college and departmental lines. Successful applicants are awarded a one-course teaching load reduction to support their participation in the weekly fellows seminar, organized around an annual theme. Fellows also collectively invite to campus four to five prominent visiting scholars, each of whom guest-leads a session of the seminar and delivers a public lecture in the Institute’s Distinguished Visiting Lecture series.

The theme of the 2009-10 Humanities Institute seminar is “Intellectual Life at Moments of Crisis.” At this moment of national and global crisis and potential transformation, the seminar’s broad project will be to explore the historical and contemporary conceptions, roles, and impacts of intellectual life and intellectual workers (in the arts and sciences, as well as the humanities, and both inside and outside of academic institutions) in times of political, social, cultural, or economic upheaval.

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In response to this description, faculty members from five schools and colleges—Liberal Arts, Fine Arts, Communication, Business, and Social Work—submitted fellowship applications that detailed the ways in which their scholarly interests and current research projects addressed the seminar’s theme and would contribute to its inquiry. Some of the wide-ranging projects that next year’s fellows will share with their colleagues in the 2009-10 seminar address the following issues: Arab intellectuals’ encounters with the West and with the ideologies of modernity; Machiavelli’s The Prince and the transformation of the medieval Renaissance Florentine state; artists’ responses to Argentina’s political and economic crisis at the turn of the 21st century; Confederate literary production and intellectual style in the Civil War era; how the U. S. media depicts and affects US-Chinese cooperation on environmental matters; Sergei Eisenstein and the representation of modern political violence; the role of intellectuals in promoting and thwarting Egypt’s democracy movement; theorizing resiliency during times of social uncertainty and renewal; how business organizations participate in the intellectual life of society; Japanese intellectuals and the suicide crisis; scientific and popular discourses in the debate over the teaching of evolution; and the intellectual crisis in contemporary American educational policy and higher education.

The HI faculty seminar meets weekly on Thursday afternoons from 2:00-5:00 pm.

2009-‘10 Humanities Institute Faculty Fellows

Fall
Kamran Ali, Assoc. Prof., Anthropology
Jason Brownlee, Asst. Prof, Government
Ruramisai Charumbira, Asst. Prof., History
Alison Frazier, Assoc. Prof., History
Andrea Giunta, Professor, Art History
Linda Golden, Professor, Marketing
Coleman Hutchison, Asst. Prof., English
Joan Neuberger, Professor, History
Karen Pagani, Asst. Prof., French and Italian
Nassos Papalexandrou, Assoc. Prof., Art History
Hannah Wojciechowski, Assoc. Prof., English

Spring
Katie Arens, Professor, Germanic Studies
Kirsten Cather, Asst. Prof., Asian Studies
David Edwards, Professor, Government
Tarek El-Ariss, Asst. Prof., Middle Eastern Studies
Robertta Green, Prof., Social Work
Caroline O’Meara, Asst. Prof, Musicology
Tom Palaima, Professor, Classics
Elizabeth Pomeroy, Professor, Social Work
Denné Reed, Asst. Prof., Anthropology
Violina Rindova, Assoc. Prof., Management
Sonia Seeman, Asst. Prof., Ethnomusicology
Ye Sun, Asst. Prof., Advertising
Difficult Dialogues Program Explores Cultural Pluralism and Academic Freedom

In partnership with the Ford Foundation, UT’s School of Undergraduate Studies, and the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Humanities Institute is designing courses, workshops, and public programs to help students and citizens discuss difficult social issues in a productive way. UT is one of only sixteen campuses nationwide whose Difficult Dialogues programs received a second round of funding from the Ford Foundation.

At a site visit in February 2009, Robert M. O’Neil, who directs the Difficult Dialogues Initiative for the Ford Foundation, praised the University for making Difficult Dialogues courses part of its core curriculum for undergraduates. In Spring 2009, UT is offering two courses for first-year students: “Race and Policy,” taught by Prof. Rob Crosnoe of the Department of Sociology, and “Religion and Sexuality,” taught by Ann Cvetkovich, a Professor of English. Additional Difficult Dialogues courses are being developed for the 2009-10 academic year, including courses on science and religion, HIV-AIDS, and immigration and cultural diversity.

Also this spring the Humanities Institute collaborated with the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum to offer a dialogue facilitation training for docents who will lead tours of the museum’s new exhibition, “Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America through Galveston Island.” On exhibit from February 21 through October 11, 2009, “Forgotten Gateway” is a traveling exhibit curated by Dr. Suzanne Seriff. At the training the docents, including UT graduate students in Museum Studies, learned how to engage visitors in meaningful dialogue about contemporary immigration issues. Trainer Tammy L. Bormann taught the docents the characteristics of effective dialogue, the role and techniques of dialogue facilitators, and how to manage conflict in dialogues.

In April 2009 the Humanities Institute will sponsor a Public Dialogue on Science, Religion, and Academic Freedom featuring Robert O’Neil. Currently a visiting professor in the UT School of Law, O’Neil is the director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression. A former president of University of Virginia and the University of Wisconsin System, O’Neil is an authority on free speech, freedom of the press, and academic freedom. Several speakers in the fields of science and religion will join O’Neil in dialogue. One of the topics of concern will be the teaching of evolution in the public schools.

Difficult Visiting Lecture Series: Ethical Life in a Global Society

"Where are the Animals? Understanding Torture, Abuse, and Correction"

This Event has been canceled.

Dr. Colin (Joan) Dayan, Professor of English and Robert Penn Warren Professor in the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, is the author of Haiti, History, and the Gods, and The Story of Cruel and Unusual, which traces the legal history of the current war on terror’s worst excesses.
whom she sees as hijacking Iran’s popular revolution—a revolution that she, the first woman judge to preside over a legislative court in Iran, supported. Refusing to leave Iran, Ebadi has worked for thirty years to effect democratic change from within and to win justice for victims of civil and human rights abuse. For these brave and patriotic efforts, Ebadi became in 2003 the first Iranian, the first Shia, and the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Prize.

Full event schedules for all three programs appear on this page and the facing one. Highlights of the Dialogues of the Carmelites symposium include a March 31 public lecture, “And Then There Were Nuns: Revolution and Religion in Poulenc’s Dialogues of the Carmelites” by opera scholar and director Fred Plotkin, the former Metropolitan Opera Performance Manager and the author of the standard text Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera. And on April 17, the night before the opera’s opening, UT professor of music theory Eric Drott will join Dialogues director Eric Einhorn and singer Virginia Zeani, who sang the lead role of Blanche in the 1953 premiere of Poulenc’s work, in a roundtable conversation on “La Voix Humaine: Understanding and Performing Francis Poulenc.” Dr. Drott brings to the discussion expertise in post-war European and American avant-garde music and in the interaction of music and politics in France.

Three faculty affiliates of UT’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies will take lead roles in the public discussions of The Septembers of Shiraz and its surrounding contexts and issues: Dr. Elisheva Rosman, a visiting Israeli scholar who studies the relations between Israel and the Gulf States, as well as the relation between civil society and religious movements in Israel itself; Dr. Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, an expert on modern Persian literature and on Iranian emigrant communities in the U.S.; and Dr. Karen Grumberg, who specializes in American Jewish literature and comparative Jewish literatures, particularly the writing of women.

Shirin Ebadi’s residency, as the 2009 Cline Visiting Professor in the Humanities, will kick off on Monday April 27 with a lecture on “Democracy in Iran and the Middle East,” hosted by UT President Bill Powers in the auditorium of the AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center. The Wednesday and Thursday afternoon roundtables will engage Dr. Ebadi in discussion with some of UT’s leading human rights and foreign policy scholars, as well as area specialists in struggles for economic and political justice in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Participating faculty in the public discussions with Dr. Ebadi will include law professor Karen Engle, anthropologists Kamran Ali and Shannon Speed, sociologist Mounira Charrad, Middle Eastern Studies professors Kamran Aghaie and Faegheh Shirazi, political scientist Clement Henry, religious historian Denise Spellberg, and literary and cultural historians Neville Hoad and Barbara Harlow.
**Dialogues of the Carmelites Symposium Events Schedule**

**Mon. March 23**  
“Francis Poulenc’s Life and Times.” Margaret Perry, ALO Education Director, Ducloux Hall, 901 Barton Springs Road, 7 p.m. (Parking at Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd.)

**Tues. March 31**  
And Then There Were Nuns: Revolution and Religion in Poulenc’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. A lecture by Fred Plotkin, author of *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera*, Ducloux Hall, 7 p.m.

**Sun. April 5**  
A Program of French Songs and music by Francis Poulenc. The French Legation Museum, 802 San Marcos St, 5 p.m.

**Friday, April 17**  
“La Voix Humaine: Understanding and Performing Francis Poulenc.” A conversation about the challenges of producing and performing *Dialogues*. Participants include: Virginia Zeani (original Blanche in premiere of *Dialogues*), Eric Einhorn (director of ALO production), Heidi Stober (Blanche in ALO production), and Dr. Eric Drott, UT School of Music. Ducloux Hall, 7 p.m.

**April 18, 22, 24, 26**  
Performances of *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at The Long Center for the Performing Arts

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**Mayors Book Club Public Events Schedule**

**Sun. April 5**  
Book Discussion. Led by Dr. Elishева Rosman. Jewish Community Association of Austin, 7300 Hart Lane. 7 p.m. Co-Sponsored by Congregation Agudas Achim.

**Mon. April 6**  
Film Screening of *Persepolis*, film discussion to follow led by Nastaran Kherad, author of the memoir *In the House of My Bibi: Growing Up in Revolutionary Iran*. Alamo Drafthouse South, 1120 South Lamar, Austin, TX 78704. 7 p.m.

**Tues. April 14**  
Book Discussion. Led by Dr. Evan Carton. Pleasant Hill Branch, Austin Public Library. 211 E. William Cannon Dr. 7 p.m.

**Mon. April 20**  
Book Discussion. Led by Dr. Mohammed Ghanoonparvar. Spicewood Springs Branch, Austin Public Library. 8637 Spicewood Springs Road. 7 p.m.

**Fri. April 24**  
Meet the Author. Reception and book signing, followed by a conversation and Q & A with author Dalia Sofer, hosted and moderated by Dr. Karen Grumberg. City Hall Atrium and Council Chambers, 301 W. 2nd St. Reception begins at 6:30 p.m., conversation begins at 7:30 p.m.
The Humanities Institute’s Living Newspaper (LN) Project has undergone tremendous growth over the course of its three-year history, reaching approximately eighty Central Texas middle school, high school, and community college teachers, as well as several hundred students. Building on this successful body of experience, we have begun a series of program development initiatives in order to expand the reach and depth of the Living Newspaper’s performance-based human rights pedagogy. These initiatives include: promoting the LN Project through conferences targeted to educators; building strong partnerships at the district level to facilitate cross-disciplinary work among teachers; and exploring the possibility of branching out to create a paid summer Living Newspaper performance troupe for middle and high school students.

The Living Newspaper Project’s forays into conference presentation have been very successful, with recent workshops at the Imagining America conference in Los Angeles, the University Interscholastic League conference in Austin, and the Texas Educational Theatre Association’s annual meeting in Houston. This month, the Living Newspaper will return to the location of its first UT production, with a workshop for the Rapoport Center conference, “Human Rights at the University of Texas: A Dialogue at the Intersection of Academics and Advocacy.”

Teacher liaison Ann David and Living Newspaper program coordinator Tessa Farmer presented the Living Newspaper Project to a meeting of Round Rock ISD theatre teachers in early January. The meeting was designed to continue discussion with the district about how to implement the Living Newspaper as part of district-wide curricula. The idea of implementing Living Newspapers at the district level came from participant feedback over the course of the three-year LN program. Obtaining the support of administrators, teachers have told us, is a key step in creating lasting and constructive cross-disciplinary LN projects. Our hope is that this project enables greater collaboration between Theatre, Language Arts and Social Studies teachers.

An exciting new possibility for the LN program is the formation of a Living Newspaper Summer Youth Performance Troupe. We are currently seeking foundation or donor support for, designed to be a rigorous five-week summer program, co-sponsored by the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. Over the course of the summer project, teenage troupe members would research, write, stage, and perform their own Living Newspaper embodiment activity.

In Memoriam
Margaret Woodruff-Wieding 1942-2009

Humanities Institute staff and affiliates mourn the passing of Dr. Margaret Woodruff-Wieding, a founding member of the Living Newspaper team. An Adjunct Professor of Humanities and English at Austin Community College, Margaret organized her Humanities 1301 curriculum at ACC around Living Newspaper research and production, leading students of varying ages, races, and educational backgrounds to collaborate in the creation and performance of powerful scripts about current immigration and social justice issues. Margaret was a lifelong student, a passionate educator, and an activist for peace.
Over the past two semesters, the Humanities Institute has played an instrumental role in an initiative designed to bring together the broad variety of services offered to the local K-12 community by UT organizations. Dubbed the “Education Outreach Consortium,” this initiative establishes mechanisms by which University staff and faculty who work with elementary, middle, and high schools statewide may share research findings, educational strategies, and university resources.

Thus far, over 50 campus organizations have been identified as providing K-12 services such as professional development for teachers, curricular resources for both students and teachers, educational programming for local elementary, middle, and high school students, and educational consulting for administrators. “It was surprising to learn not only about the sheer number and variety of UT’s K-12 programs, but that there was no formal means by which the sponsoring units, which all have similar missions and serve similar communities, could simply share ideas, best practices, and contacts,” said Paul Michels, HI Education Programs Coordinator.

The Consortium was founded last summer by the Humanities Institute’s Jeremy Dean, Assistant Director for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Christopher Rose, and the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation’s Education Director Deborah Wise. The significantly expanded group now includes participants from the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) as well as the Division for Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE).

Participants in the Consortium have been excited to learn about similar programs and to collaborate with like-minded colleagues across the UT campus. “It’s a win-win situation: we don’t have to expend energy reinventing the wheel if we have the opportunity to learn from each other. We can also direct our audiences to the resources that others offer, which means that they’ll keep thinking about UT whenever they need assistance or training,” said Rose. The consortium has established a monthly brown bag lunch series to explore common interests, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration among its members. Future brown bag topics will feature discussions about working with underserved populations, strategies for individual program evaluation, external fundraising, and collaborative grant writing opportunities. Also under discussion is a possible K-12 Education Outreach fair, which would bring K-12 educators and administrators to the UT campus in order to showcase the array of programming available to them and to solicit their vision of their current and future programming needs.

A major initiative of the Consortium has been the redesign of the University’s “Community Outreach” page, one of the primary left hand navigation links on the UT home page. Consortium members are working closely with Web communications specialist Nyleva Corley from the OPA and members of the DDCE to update this site. “As the central public portal to the extraordinary range and richness of the University’s programmatic engagement with surrounding communities, the current page—offering an impoverished and disorganized collection of virtually random links—is an embarrassment,” argued HI Director Evan Carton at a recent consortium meeting. “But the OPA has given us an extraordinary opportunity to design something that will allow every visitor to the UT home page to discover with one click the vibrancy of our collective efforts to fulfill this dimension of the University’s mission.”
A Free Minds Student's Perspective

By Robert Ray Toines, Jr.

The Free Minds Project is an excellent fuel that feeds the flames of the mind. I entered this program as a 28-year-old male wanting to get back in school. The problem was not knowing how to do so. I already had college hours but felt like maybe my time for schooling was over. During this time, the Free Minds Project was brought to my attention.

Once accepted, I really didn’t know what to expect. It had been years since I had classmates and professors to engage with scholastic activities. I wondered if I still had the skills learned nearly a decade ago. Well, it didn’t take long for me to realize I did! The Free Minds Project re-ignited old flames and new ones too. Suddenly I was answering questions and having philosophical conversations with Matthew [Daude Laurents], or laughing at Shakespearean dialect with Domino [Perez]. People were happy to see me and interested in what I had to say. I remember thinking, “I’ve still got it!”

It’s like I found a part of myself that I thought was gone forever. I’ve remembered my love for writing and open discussions with various minds. I’ve gone to plays and art museums. All these things were once a regular part of my life. I am so excited to be reunited with other forms of culture and the ideas of different cultures. I’ve also enjoyed the family-like bond that has been created with my fellow students. I’ve felt the effects of prayers from a classroom of friends. That’s right: friends. I have made new and positive friends. That’s awesome! I can’t wait for class some-times. It’s always educational and fun too. It’s not always easy, but that’s what creates a sense of accomplishment once difficult tasks are completed.

I am sincerely happy that I joined this program. Vivé [Griffith] and the rest of the staff have been wonderful and caring teachers. I can clearly see where I am headed now, and with determination and hard work I am sure I will get there soon. I know I can finish college with good grades now. No questions. No doubts. I’ve remembered my capabilities now and the sky is the limit.

Free Minds Master Classes

In October, Free Minds alumni and current students met with Evan Carton for the first Free Minds master class. Designed to keep the conversation going, master classes offer a chance for alumni and students to pull up a chair and talk about texts together. Carton focused his master class on short stories by Sandra Cisneros. In November, Clayton Stromberger, outreach coordinator for the Shakespeare at Winedale program, offered a master class exploring A Midsummer Night’s Dream, including an optional performance of the play on campus.

Master classes allow alumni to remain connected to the program and give students from different years a chance to work together.

“The opportunity to participate in the Free Minds master classes has kept my mind tuned and allowed me to continue to learn,” says Marissa Machado, a 2008 graduate. “I love reading a piece and then meeting with others to discover their ideas, reflections, and insights into the work.”

Spring classes include a comparison of the inaugural speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama, led by Jim Sidbury, a look at the roots of skepticism with Matthew Daude Laurents, and a National Poetry Month gathering with Vivé Griffith. Master classes remind us that even after nine months of discourse around the Free Minds table, the conversation has just begun.
Living Newspaper

Newspaper in conjunction with the Museum’s current exhibition “Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America Through Galveston Island.” Our intent is for members of the company to be paid, in a continuation of the legacy of the WPA’s Federal Theater Project, and to make the experience accessible to lower-income students.

In addition, we have continued our work in the classroom, with five projects over the course of the fall semester. Brian McDonough and Heidi Klein’s Advanced Placement Spanish classes at Westwood High School undertook the first foreign language Living Newspapers. Tiara Naputi, an experienced and bilingual Graduate Consultant, worked extensively with the classes on projects centering on human rights issues in Latin America. Reflecting on the experience, Tiara said, “I think that future projects geared towards human rights issues in Latin America are necessary and timely.... Regardless of the language of the performances, everyone involved in the project gained insight into some historical and contemporary human rights issues in an area of the world that deserves more attention in projects such as these.” In another Living Newspaper first, Stephen Bratteng’s astronomy class used the living newspaper form to learn and to teach each other about our solar system. Patrick Schmidt, a returning LN teacher at Round Rock High School, led his creative writing class in creating Living Newspapers on gay marriage and arranged marriage with the help of Graduate Consultants Katelyn Wood and Rawan Arar. Malhaz Jibladze, now on his fourth LN project at AISD’s Liberal Arts and Science Academy, worked with Graduate Consultants Artina Hunter and Shu Yang to craft video projects on a wide variety of human rights subjects. Artina also worked with Angie Andrade at Travis Early College High School in San Antonio to create a series of Living Newspaper performances around issues of immigration, human smuggling, and bilingual education.


Save The Date

Please join us in honoring this year’s Free Minds class at the Free Minds graduation ceremony on May 19 2009 at 7 p.m.
OUR MISSION

THE MISSION OF THE HUMANITIES INSTITUTE AT The University of Texas at Austin is to build civic and intellectual community—within, across, and beyond the University’s walls—by bringing people together to explore issues and ideas that matter. Our educational programs, cultural events, and public forums provide participants with stimulating occasions for discovery, dialog, and transformation. A gateway to the varied resources of the University, the Humanities Institute pursues creative partnerships with other institutions and constituencies throughout Central Texas to help citizens and scholars jointly produce better understandings of themselves, others, and the world.