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Extra-Curricular Engagements: A Case for Provocative Displays

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As the solo librarian at Clemson University’s Gunnin Architecture Library, I have the luxury of programming the most high-profile lighted display case in an active, multi-disciplinary academic building. Over the past two years, I have transformed this opportunity into a ‘bully pulpit,’ serving up the big, wide world beyond South Carolina to a mostly homegrown student body. Instead of curriculum-based exhibits, I engage faculty, colleagues, students, and friends in collaborating to stage extra-curricular ‘provocations’: interdisciplinary displays that showcase library materials while exploring social and political issues and global cultures.

**Art for Political Action and Social Justice: “When you believe that Art can change the World...”**

Objectives:
1. Engage the entire art faculty in developing a new collection focus area: activist art.
2. Spark an awareness in students and passers-by that artists have the power to disrupt, challenge, stimulate, and precipitate change; i.e., that art is political.
3. Inspire art and design students to address the world with their work.
4. Test the strengths and weaknesses of the Gunnin Library’s collections re: rising contemporary and global artists. Flip a creating wave of political anxiety into a collection development opportunity.

Concept: Emphasis on significant works (from a variety of contexts) standing up to significant historical moments, rather than on individual “important” artists. High visual impact—juxtapose lesser-known works and iconic stuff, without hierarchies—focus on intent to subvert, to court personal risk for a principle, to make art that reveals, deplores, prosecutes.

**Gritty Cities: Urban landscapes, urban lives**

Objectives:
1. Encourage students to explore the world available to them on film. Foster curiosity.
2. The library has films! Expose urban planning and design students to real-world environments and living conditions, through a medium outside of classroom study.
3. Test the extent and limits of Clemson Libraries’ film collection, given the launch of a new Global Cinema undergraduate degree program in another University college (in other words, a collection development initiative).
4. Engage international faculty and students, especially, in talking about (and suggesting) movies from their homelands & favorite places!

Concept: Using DVDs in their cases to shape a recognizable ‘world map,’ featuring films in which The City itself is either the main character or a ‘critical actor’ in the overall narrative, enabling or constraining lives, outcomes, and the cinematic experience. Hard-to-populate areas of the map will reveal weaknesses in our collection.

**“Can you see me now?” Witness to a World of Displaced Peoples**

Objectives:
1. Introduce an awareness of human beings facing extreme situations across the globe into the fitting attention spans of students at university.
2. Showcase the purpose and unflinching compassion photographers and filmmakers bring to the high human calling of documenting individuals/families/peoples living through unbearable times and circumstances.
3. Inspire students to become involved world citizens.

Concept: Large format documentary photography covering a wide spectrum of displacements—both causes and affected groups—grounding a dense array of films (predominantly theatrical releases) from many cultures, telling the stories of people alienated from their homes by irresistible forces. Included: many races, nationalities, geographies, events, modern historical periods, and a range of storylines (political strife, crime & corruption, war, racism, social exclusion, economic exploitation, catastrophe, poverty, greed, resource collapse).

**Threads in Common: Celebrating textile cultures**

Objectives:
1. Expose design students to design references, patterns, and forms of expression and material culture beyond their experience.
2. Demonstrate that the irresistible urge to express and celebrate identity through color, fiber, pattern, technique, materials, and design reveals how profoundly shared human purpose and creative genius trump the differences among peoples.
3. Communicate my passion for textiles! ‘Test the waters’ for interest in this art category.

Concept: An extravagant display of books + textiles from a private collection demonstrate the rich fabric arts of Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. Tapestries from Uzbekistan, Iran, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia (Borneo, Java, Sumatra), India, and multiple Chinese provinces. Explore what cultures around the world have in common in their identity expressions. Actual textiles from multiple cultures make it ‘real’.

#showmeyourprocess

Objectives:
1. Demonstrate to prospective students (and their parents) that THEY CAN DO THIS! The design process is layered and messy, with room for all levels of drawing & design ability. Skill comes with effort.
2. Highlight Clemson’s ‘Fluid Campus’ studio & ‘Maymester’ concepts: travel, real-world community design/build projects, practical preparation for a career in architecture, education through experience.
3. Feature a visiting lecturer’s studio instruction, to boost his prospects within the department.

Concept: Display accordion-page sketchbooks to maximum vertical and horizontal effect. All random sketches generated by studio participants are fair game. Convey the on-site experience and collaboration with school children and staff in sequence, from beginning to end of studio.

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**REFERENCES**

3. Clemson University. [2018 student population: 24,951].
4. Lee Hall enrollment of 909.
5. More than two thirds of undergrads are in-state students: 68% in 2018.
6. Across ‘Broadway’ from a 250-seat lecture hall used by all Clemson colleges; i.e., A dedicated 8’ x 12’ x 15” lighted, securable display case with reconfigurable glass.
8. Clemson University is home to the only Architecture and Landscape Architecture programs in South Carolina. The Gunnin is the sole library in the state dedicated to supporting art and building & environmental design programs at the university level.
9. The Gunnin Library’s gate count is hitting record highs year upon year: over 71,000 in 2018, for a collection of 41,300 items on-site serving programs with a total student enrollment of 909.
10. The library has films! Expose urban planning and design students to real-world environments and living conditions, through a medium outside of classroom study.
11. Test the extent and limits of Clemson Libraries’ film collection, given the launch of a new Global Cinema undergraduate degree program in another University college (in other words, a collection development initiative).
12. Engage international faculty and students, especially, in talking about (and suggesting) movies from their homelands & favorite places!
13. Using DVDs in their cases to shape a recognizable ‘world map,’ featuring films in which The City itself is either the main character or a ‘critical actor’ in the overall narrative, enabling or constraining lives, outcomes, and the cinematic experience. Hard-to-populate areas of the map will reveal weaknesses in our collection.
14. Introduce an awareness of human beings facing extreme situations across the globe into the fitting attention spans of students at university.
15. Showcase the purpose and unflinching compassion photographers and filmmakers bring to the high human calling of documenting individuals/families/peoples living through unbearable times and circumstances.
16. Inspire students to become involved world citizens.
17. Large format documentary photography covering a wide spectrum of displacements—both causes and affected groups—grounding a dense array of films (predominantly theatrical releases) from many cultures, telling the stories of people alienated from their homes by irresistible forces. Included: many races, nationalities, geographies, events, modern historical periods, and a range of storylines (political strife, crime & corruption, war, racism, social exclusion, economic exploitation, catastrophe, poverty, greed, resource collapse).
18. Test the waters’ for interest in this art category.
19. An extravagant display of books + textiles from a private collection demonstrate the rich fabric arts of Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. Tapestries from Uzbekistan, Iran, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia (Borneo, Java, Sumatra), India, and multiple Chinese provinces. Explore what cultures around the world have in common in their identity expressions. Actual textiles from multiple cultures make it ‘real’.

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**ADDRESS**

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