
FEATURE:

2016 Learning Cluster Students Study Around the World

Under the generous funding support from the Luis and Linda Nieves Family Foundation, 2016 Learning Cluster students researched and studied in: New York City, French Polynesia, Ghana and Argentina. Learning Cluster Faculty reflect on their transformative academic and travel experiences:

Aesthetic Theory: NYC vs LA – Ryan Caldwell, Associate Professor of Sociology

The unique approach of the traveling learning cluster to New York City focused on combining different theoretical and philosophical perspectives with the actual experiences of various kinds of art as a means to understanding art and aesthetic moments. The learning cluster thus used theory as a method for analysis, where abstract frames of thinking were made a reality for us through real-life experience. In fact, some of these experiences allowed for a fuller understanding of the self, our connections with others, and how it is that we impact others and culture--all through the consideration of art!

Our larger research questions are thus: ***What is art? How do we know it when we see it? How is art transformative (to the self and larger culture)? How is it possible to understand the art world of New York City through the use of aesthetic philosophy, cultural theory, and experiential learning? How are art communities created and maintained by artists within New York City? How is this similar or different from our previous LC experiences or an understanding of art culture within Los Angeles? How can we make sense of our experiences in ways that allow for us to become leaders of culture within the community?***

The significance of these kinds of questions and this approach is twofold: First, it is ***theoretically important*** in that it makes theory and philosophy relevant to students' lives rather than as abstract principles that are somehow unconnected. Second, aesthetic concepts become illuminated as a means to discussing ***cultural and historical issues as associated with cities, individuals and selves***. This is important as many of these issues interrogate common themes associated with modernity, authenticity, interpretation, reality, awareness, etc., all of which are connected to social and cultural theory and philosophy. Both Los Angeles and New York are the center of such examples that thematically exemplify aesthetic philosophy and cultural theory, and so it is for these reasons that we chose these sites within the United States. In this way, we were able to comparatively study Los Angeles and New York City such that connections between art, culture, aesthetic experiences, service learning experiences, as well as engagement with artists were contrasted and reflected upon. In the end, a deeper understanding of all above mentioned themes as well as an understanding of our own self-awareness as part of a community were gained.



French Polynesia: A Pacific Oxymoron – Gilles Glacet, Assistant Professor of French Language & Culture



Our Learning Cluster aimed, after studying its history in depth, to explore the present situation and future of Tahitian economics, politics and culture and how these transformations play into identity. Specifically, we studied the roots and significance of tribal tattoos, traditional dance, navigation and other practices which were banned during colonization, but are currently being revived. We had several meetings with professors of different fields at the Université de la Polynésie française to gain an expert's perspective on our research. To better grasp the economic situation, we spoke to the head of the economic department at the university as well as people working in one of Tahiti's biggest industries, black pearl farming. We learned more about the political system of Tahiti, the extent of its autonomy and its strengths and weaknesses. We also learned how feasible the independence movement is and its importance, through public opinion. Through travelling to Tahiti, we were able to understand Tahiti's decision to remain dependent and how this has influenced the islands and their people up into modern day. We expanded upon lessons from the Pacific Basin class through real-life interaction with local people. There has been a cultural revival of traditional culture in the past few years and they identify as both Tahitian and French. We discovered much of what we researched online was sometimes inaccurate or biased and fed

into our misconceptions. By speaking with actual Tahitians and with people living and working in Tahiti, we were able to understand the real situation.

In this photo, we are about to join the Tahitian Voyaging Society on the Faafaite va'a, the traditional double-canoe. Ocean navigation has always been an integral part of French Polynesian life and culture. In ancient times, it was used to facilitate cross-cultural exchange and trade. After being suppressed during British and French colonization, navigation is used to rediscover the knowledge their ancestors had. On board, we learned about the construction of the boat, how to prepare it for sailing, traditional navigation techniques, and the knowledge to navigate the Pacific they are working to rediscover today.

Representing the Slave Trade: US Tourism and Ghana – James O'Neil Spady, Associate Professor of American History

Students in the learning cluster "Representing the Slave Trade" traveled to Ghana, January 17-27, 2016. We studied how Ghanaians and African-American returnees represent the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Of special interest were the so-called "slave castles," coastal fortifications within which enslaved African people were warehoused while awaiting shipment to the Americas. Elmina Castle and Cape Coast Castle were primary sites for this trading. Both forts are UNESCO World Heritage sites. We made a 33 minute film of the forts and our interviews with academics, the public, and museum tour guides. Students met the Mantse Agbono of the Ga, various academics at the University of Ghana and the Institute of African Studies, and numerous Ghanaians and diasporan returnees.



SUA students at One Africa (Elmina, Ghana).

Housing and Weatherization on Argentina – Tomás Crowder-Taraborrelli, Visiting Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies

The "Weatherization in Low-Income Housing" Learning Cluster combined sustainability research with hands-on weatherization training in order to make homes in Buenos Aires, Argentina, safer and more habitable. SUA students worked with Community Housing Partners to obtain energy auditing certification to conduct inspections. In La Josefa, a working class

neighborhood in Campana, Buenos Aires, students collaborated with nonprofit organizations, Foro de Vivienda Social y Eficiencia Energética (FOVISEE) and Weatherizers Without Borders (WWWB) to perform energy audits, providing recommendations to families, and executing low-cost retrofits over three days in three participating homes. US Ambassador Noah Mamet visited the site and offered his support for similar international cooperation efforts to promote weatherization practices.

