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ENVS 0401 A
Spring 2016 Project Statement

***Communicating Environmental Issues:
Using the Arts for Education, Inspiration and Engagement.***

Community Partners: dj Helleman, Curator & Director of Exhibitions, and Ashley Jimenez, Gallery Manager and Assistant Curator, Burlington City Arts, www.burlingtoncityarts.org

Burlington City Arts' annual *Of Land and Local* exhibition facilitates multidisciplinary dialogues around environmental issues and challenges through a range of residencies, art making, and community programming. Our class will be directly and intensely engaged in the programming connected to this year's *Of Land and Local* exhibition, including related educational and community outreach events.

BCA describes this annual exhibition in the following way:

Of Land & Local is an annual exhibition about art and the environment. As an ongoing partnership between Shelburne Farms and Burlington City Arts, Of Land & Local combines the missions of both organizations and supports artist-led conversations about social, ethical, and political issues impacting the Vermont landscape. Now entering its fourth year, the exhibition continues its commitment to residencies, the creation of new work, site-specific and place-based art making as well as community programming that encourages critical dialogue. This coming August 2016 marks five years since Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont. From literal to metaphorical, the ubiquitous symbolism of water will be the subject of this year's exhibition. Of Land & Local will bring together the work of artists interested in the complex position water has in our current geological epoch – the Anthropocene. Here in Vermont, the effects of agriculture and climate change experienced through the Champlain Basin and traumatic flooding continue to reinforce our need for water resiliency. Our increasing awareness of water highlights the complicated place water has in our world; both its necessity for sustaining life and its destructive power are overwhelmingly present in the history and future of Vermont.

Rationale:

Why do the arts matter, even (or especially) if you are not an artist? What role can and should the arts play in communicating and educating the public on pressing environmental issues such as pollution and climate change? Can producing and experiencing the arts in its many facets (paintings, films, sculptures, music, drama and dance performances) provide us with hope and inspiration in the face of global and pervasive environmental challenges? These are the kinds of questions that artists, arts organizations and our own course will engage.

In our work with Burlington City Arts **we will pursue the mission of the Environmental Studies Senior Seminar to bring ES majors together, across different foci, to work on an interdisciplinary project in service to a community partner whose work will be meaningfully served and enhanced by the**

collective expertise of the seminar's members. In working together across foci in the sciences, social sciences and humanities we will learn about both the differences between and the points of connection among our various fields and sub-fields. We will probe the Big Questions of Environmental Studies with attention to the ways in which environmental problems can be communicated to a broader public, leading citizens in Vermont and beyond to become more environmentally educated and engaged, in this case, through the arts.

Details and Scope of the Collaboration with BCA

Your contributions to this collaboration with BCA include:

- Functioning as **content specialists** by researching key water issues in Vermont across a range of stakeholder groups, demographic groups, and regions. This research will be used to help define key themes and sub-themes for the exhibit and your briefings on these themes will be shared with participating artists.
 - You have free range to consider issues focused on groundwater, surface water, stormwater, drinking water etc., but at least one theme should be **Lake Champlain focused** given the prominence of the lake to Vermont's natural and cultural identity and the gravity of current pollution problems in the lake.
 - While the exhibit is place-based and therefore will be focused at the Vermont scale, you are invited to bring in global and national water issues to highlight how Vermont is not dealing with these issues in isolation.
 - BCA organizers want to blend historical issues, current events, AND innovative future solutions, so explore your issues with eyes towards past, present and future.
 - BCA also hopes to balance themes of the beauty and resilience of water/bodies of water with the equally relevant themes of threat and destruction.
- **Working with BCA as gatherers and synthesizers of water narratives** around the state. BCA organizers want to include a blend of new media, technology, performance, personal narrative, and multisensory (sight, sound, texture) experiences. ***It is in regard to the narrative piece where your assistance is needed to catalog documented / existing water narratives in Vermont.*** Gathering these narratives can be achieved by contacting and connecting with sources such as existing films/Vermont filmmakers, historical societies, Vermont Public Radio, the Vermont Folklife Center, etc. Artists will combine the data you prepare for the first bullet (serving as a content specialist) with available — and newly synthesized — narratives to help interpret them in a new way.
- **Researching, developing and proposing several (up to 4) public events/panels that would correspond to the exhibition itself.** Each event would be focused on a certain identified theme/sub-theme and there will be significant research needed to contextualize such an event, including the selection of participants. For example, the 2015 exhibition focused on land-use issues and had panels focused on topics ranging from history of place to the aesthetics of renewable energy on the Vermont landscape.
- **Supporting an identified subset of individual artists** by providing research, contextualization, etc. for their projects.

Based upon class interest and expertise, the BCA is also open to you designing and creating an exhibit, or contributions to an exhibit, that would be part of the overall program.

There will be many other useful collaborators for your work—namely all of the organization, agencies, and non-profits that work on and/or help us understand and engage with water issues in Vermont!

Examples include: the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, Shelburne Farms, the Vermont Folklife Center, the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, the Vermont Historical Society, the Lake Champlain Basin Program, The Intervale, Rokeby Museum, Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Vermont Environmental Consortium, the Agency of Natural Resources, etc.!

Communication, Skills Building and the Bigger Picture:

BCA's purposeful attention to incorporating a range of perspectives and approaches to their work *is exactly the type of work we wanted to expose you to as you transition to personal and/or professional lives dedicated to addressing today's social and environmental problems, challenges and opportunities.*

The skills that are paramount for addressing these challenges include 1) the ability to integrate knowledge from across a range of disciplines, 2) the ability to address and even anticipate social and systems complexity 3) historical, cultural and political understanding and 4) appreciating the extent to which personal values and local context influence the way people behave and review and evaluate information. These four categories also speak to modern-day science and society issues—i.e. that you cannot address the full complexity of issues from just one (scientific) perspective, that differing cultural and political values call for a range of problem-solving approaches, and that engagement processes that are responsive to this range of perspectives result in more innovative and resilient solutions. Our project will well help you to develop and deploy these skills as you create a range of effective communication and engagement tools, with the arts highlighted as a powerful means of education and inspiration (a few excellent sources pertaining to these skills are listed below).

Jacobs, Katharine. 2001. "Connecting Science, Policy and Decision-Making: A Handbook for Researchers and Science Agencies." NOAA Office of Global Programs. [Connecting Science, Policy and Decision Making](#)

National Council for the Social Studies. 2008. "A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies: Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy." [Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy](#)

Munroe, Diane. 2016. "Interdisciplinary Community-Connected Capstone Courses: A Model for Engaging Undergraduates with Public Policy." CUR Quarterly Volume 36, Number 2. Council on Undergraduate Research (in press).

Resources from the [Center for Public Engagement with Science & Technology](#)

Sarewitz, Daniel. 2015 "CRISPR: Science Can't Solve It." *Nature*. 522, 413–414. <http://www.nature.com/news/crispr-science-can-t-solve-it-1.17806>