

Arts and Community

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When I started this fellowship, my initial goal was to construct a project that introduced my music performance students to an outward-facing approach to music making and provide them the opportunity to engage with a local or regional arts education institution. My hope was to offer them experience in presenting their art to an audience beyond that of the academic institution. I had what I thought was a fairly straightforward idea of what I wanted to do. Through workshop sessions, hearing others' approaches and getting feedback, I realized that my project would require more long-term foundation building than I had first envisioned, and broke my project into three smaller projects that would get me closer to my initial goal. The practical hurdles or parameters that limited these projects included first, the need to schedule most activities on campus and/or during class hours. Community college students are a diverse group and often have demands on their daily lives that university students do not. Second, the constantly evolving personnel of the class/ensemble. New students each quarter mean that cohesion and communication as an ensemble must be built from the ground up making the long-term building of a cohesive group aesthetic difficult. And lastly, the diverse ability levels of students means that they sometimes have very different educational needs.

The three events/activities that I organized for spring quarter were:

1. Bringing in a guest artist for an interactive workshop on campus. Steve Treseler from Seattle Pacific University came and presented a workshop on improvisation for non-jazz musicians that was open to all. Students from the Music Department and Fairhaven College at WWU were invited to attend and participate, although none did. In the future, I would like to find a way to get some cross-campus participation happening.
2. The second event is a collaborative, off-campus show of original works with the creative writing students. Joanna Kenyon's creative writing class sent some of their work to the students of my Contemporary Music Ensemble, who were tasked with creating an original composed or improvised work that responds to or reflects on the original written work. The ensemble students were incredibly enthusiastic about this project, putting into practice many of the collaborative leadership and improvisation skills they had learned in class. I think in the future, Joanna and I can work toward developing the project a bit more and integrating it more organically into each of our curricula.
3. The third activity was having student host a campus lunchtime concert. Students took a leadership role in the event, deciding upon repertoire, moving gear, setting up, serving as emcee, performing and running their own sound. The event was fairly well-attended and it gave students great experience in the logistics of running a

concert, a crucial skill for practicing musicians. The low-key environment of being on-campus with an audience of peers was especially important. Experience like this would not be possible in a more high-stakes situation.

In future, I would like to include more off-campus performances and perhaps some outreach at under-served elementary or middle schools in Whatcom county. These are projects that would be appropriate for the upper-level students in the ensemble. Something that was eye-opening in the workshops was the distribution of resources and services to the city of Bellingham. In thinking about how myself and my students can contribute to arts education through outreach to our community, I feel it is important to attempt an equitable distribution, for example to county schools that have less access to arts programming.

In thinking about campus-community collaboration more generally, it was great to see in the workshops the varied ways in which fellows connected their students with and served the needs of the community. One of the best parts of this fellowship was the workshops, particularly the discussions and feedback from colleagues at other institutions or organizations. It is rare to have such a supportive group to work with. Thinking about and working on these projects also made me think more deeply about my own artistic practice and working toward a more outward-facing, community engaged model of artistic engagement.