The Creative Process

Documentary Filmmaking

PURPOSE:
We set out to produce a short documentary film exploring the role of the Creative Process through a diverse array of disciplinary perspectives and educational activities at UWTC. From the arts to the sciences, and everywhere in between, we explored the connections and interactions that define a liberal arts university, and sought to make a case for the interdisciplinary nature of education by highlighting the processes of learning and working that we all share in common.

By exploring the similarities and differences between how scientists, writers, teachers, and artists do their work, we attempt to not only broaden our audience’s notion of what creativity can mean—but also deepen their appreciation for the important role of universities in fostering a free and productive society. We believe that education is an essential pre-requisite for democracy, that creativity is more than being good at expressing ourselves in the arts, and that the goal of higher education is to create informed, engaged, and empathetic citizens.

This project proposes that the best way to demystify common notions of interdisciplinary and liberal education is to create a common ground where we can identify our own Creative Processes in each other’s work. The best way for us to create this common ground is through the medium of film.

METHOD:
As our project evolved through the planning and pre-production stage, we identified two different ways to address our purpose to discuss the Creative Process and its role in higher education and interdisciplinary learning.

Our first approach involved interviewing professors and students, asking them to define the Creative Process, and discuss their work in relation to both creativity and its process. Our questions varied greatly, but we always asked them to start by defining creativity. Other typical questions included:
- “What makes your work important to you?”
- “How do you define your own Creative Process?”
- “How do you relate your work to that of a physicist, a painter?”
- “How does the work that you do influence your community, your society?”

We attempted to film each interview in the person’s office, lab, or studio space. Our second approach involved an experimental studio session, where a musician used a five-channel-audio-visual feedback loop to dissect and discuss the process of music production. When music is placed in front of a speaker, sound waves move the speaker into expressive forms. By feeding this phenomenon back to the musician making the sounds, we created a unique method of sound visualization. Our goal was to deconstruct our knowledge of music by using sensory crossover as a tool of observation and introspection. We discussed the physics of sound, music theory, and culture, and we created new music inspired by incense.

RESULTS:
We were able to interview eleven different people, including professors, students and community members. The topics that we covered ranged widely, but from each new perspective we learned a great deal about the ways that different disciplines use and discuss creativity. We found many examples of the fundamental role of interdisciplinary thinking in problem solving and creative work. We discussed the importance of liberal education in providing students and teachers with the ability to work productively, communicate their work to others, and live rewarding and exciting lives.

Especially, we found a strong and active community of educators, who work hard every day to practice and share their creative process with others. Something every person talked about was that it is important to them that their work helps others.

We are currently in post-production, editing the interviews together and developing ways to visually express the content of our interviews. While we were not able to reach our original goal of a 30-minute documentary, the interviews we filmed provided us with invaluable perspectives and new ideas about how to continue addressing our purpose.

Our short documentary on the musical process of sound creation, and as a stand-alone piece, it offers a very unique and exciting look not only at music and musical creativity, but also at the changing landscape of sound and visual-aural experiences in electronic music. Our completed work will be available at www.ofSightandSound.com.

INTERVIEWS

Scott Hartsel: Chemistry Professor
“I think it’s the ability to see things in new ways. So for a scientist that means the ability to see what information, what data, what knowledge is out there, and put it together in a different way. Hopefully in a way that will move the science forward, or in a different direction. I think that the creative process is very similar for somebody who is in a creative field. You take what’s there and you try to make something new out of it.”

Jill Pinkney Pastrana: Education Studies
“That’s a really hard question, well because it can come out in so many different ways. And I think it impacts your life and your work and your identity in different ways and different times. So at one moment, creativity might be about solving problems, and not losing your mind. At another point, it might be about really pushing against any kind of boundaries… and that’s kind of about not losing your mind too. Maybe it’s anything that helps you to not lose your mind. But it’s also part of human expression. So there’s the kind of survival, the kind of negotiating your reality, and maintaining your humanity.”

Joel Pace: English Professor
“It’s hard to not view creativity as some spiritual act. We’re always going back to the earliest times of recorded culture, where there have been these moments when the creative and the spiritual were intertwined in song or dance. And I still see that on some level… and I certainly think that spirituality informs our world. It certainly informs my creative process, and I view the two as interchangeable.”

Mike Huggins: Former City Manager
“I’ll define it from my experience and my work, creativity is coming up with different ways of addressing chronic problems or ongoing issues. So creativity to me is coming up with an idea that will address the problem at hand.”

Michael Jacobs - Tyler Tronson - Alex Tronson
A Liberal Studies Capstone Project with Marc Goulet

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