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Arts Learning Final Synthesis and Reflection Essay

As I reflect on my progress throughout my first online course, Arts Learning and Policy, I feel I have gained practical knowledge in respective fields of study. As a class, we explored the history of arts education in America, the times and places that are conducive to arts learning, the various positions within the field, the political framework that defines the sector, and the influence each of these components has on one another. The first personal learning objective I appointed for this course – *to develop a greater awareness for the challenges and benefits of navigating an online learning environment* – was an intricate part of my overall learning experience. When students took risks with assignments or made efforts to communicate more efficiently, they clearly demonstrated competence in “digital literacy” and I feel we all became inspired by these exploits. I learned that I challenge myself in an online academic environment to navigate material in an organized fashion so that I may develop a dependable system for managing projects. As a team, we learned to take into consideration how it is that other people will view or interact with the work we've created. When you are presenting ideas in a third space, such as on the internet, your words or concepts may be easily misconstrued and this is why it is important to be as deliberately clear as possible. This course provided me with opportunities to clearly articulate my thoughts in discussion posts, in peer-critiques, in team assignments, and now in this reflective essay posted on my ePortfolio.

The second learning objective I outlined was centered around engagement, time management, and assessment (the three areas I was most concerned with in beginning the online course). The team assignments were helpful in keeping me engaged with course content, and they also supported time management skills in that we were able to set up weekly-scheduled meetings. On Mondays, we worked as a group to recap course readings and we also got a head start on each team assignment. I really appreciated that my team members preferred to submit assignments early as this mitigated stress. The way in which the course content built on to each prior week's subject area allowed me to constructively assess my efforts and understanding. For example, we were asked to identify how an arts in education partnership is different from arts integration before we learned how these various types of programs could be best implemented and evaluated. At the beginning of the course, I worked to solidify my understanding of national policy structure in arts learning; after becoming more familiar with this area, I feel I can now better serve as a well-informed arts advocate.

As I consider a personal direction for my graduate research, I find myself moving away from

studying the concept of strictly “Fair Trade” labeled cultural products and more into investigating the relationships that indigenous artisans develop in their attempts to communicate with an international audience of consumers. This course was relevant to my research interests in that it spoke to the power of building relationships and identifying resources. I look forward to applying what I have learned about policy in the arts to my future research in communication and artisan trade relationships.

In order to satisfy my forth learning objective – *to establish a comprehensive understanding of arts administrator as both a community leader and a facilitator by identifying the responsibilities of working with groups of artists and partnering organizations* – I consulted additional resources outside of the recommended course readings to enhance my comprehension of best practices in the field. When approaching the term “arts learning”, I like to think of it in the broadest sense possible and when identifying potential arts professionals, I also like to broaden my scope. Through this course, I have become more confident in the abilities of others to contribute to the field of arts learning. Recreation centers have just as much power as schools, if not more, to offer comprehensive arts education to people in need of belonging, directional support, and empowerment. Community activist groups, hospitals, federal housing programs, theaters, festivals, and parks can all offer a platform for the public to engage in social discourse and value exchange. As we progressed through the term, I opened my mind to consider even more possibilities for the future of arts learning and policy. Towards the end of the course, we discussed the role of technology in arts learning. I was able to come full circle in my comprehension of this component as I thought about my own experience with this online course as well as the ways in which technology contributes to and takes away from learning in the arts.

My last objective for the term was to identify personal strengths and weaknesses as an emerging professional in the field of arts management. The opportunities for individual growth that I am now more aware of are in the areas of grant writing skills, audience development strategies, online presentation software, and program evaluation. The development of each group project was guided by the collective decisions of our team. I also enjoyed collaborating with Stephanie on the final learning assignment; we shared varying perspectives and worked cooperatively to create a unique program plan that satisfied both of our requirements. The way I think about arts learning overall has shifted so that I am now more capable of looking at the larger picture, in considering what effects certain policies would have on participants both at the individual and organizational level, and in distinguishing what practices and characteristics are exemplary of model programs in the arts.