

History of Diversity, Equity and Social Justice at California College of the Arts

Katherine Butler, Associate Vice President for Advancement (retired)
Maxwell Leung, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Critical Studies
Melanie Corn, Associate Provost

Updated: July 20th, 2011

Introduction¹

The mission of diversity, equity, and social justice at California College of the Arts (CCA) is as easy to state as it is difficult to fulfill: *To educate those who shape culture through their work as artists, architects and designers.* This mission embodies the belief that culture can be positively shaped by those educated for a lifetime of creativity. This concept was central to the spirit of the arts and crafts movement at the beginning of the 20th century, and is a key element of liberal education at the beginning of the 21st century. The founding ideal of CCA, that art isolated from society in all its diversity impoverishes art and deprives social life of a key resource of positive change and renewal, is as pertinent today as it was 100 years ago. An education in the arts is not a technical training, but of the liberal arts tradition in the deepest sense of those words: a cultivation of one's capacity to draw on the diverse resources of an increasingly global society in order to creatively contribute to one's culture and community. CCA continues that very mission through its initiatives in diversity, equity, and social justice.

The diversity of the curriculum and our community has always been an important feature of the school, distinguishing it from the fine arts academies or *ecole des beaux-arts* models. As we continue to expand and evolve, CCA students must continue to learn to see their creative

¹ I am deeply indebted to Katherine Butler, former Associate Vice President of Advancement, for her invaluable research on a report she made for the James Irvine Foundation on the history of diversity, equity, and social justice at the California College of the Arts (formerly California College of the Arts and Crafts) in 2002. Her work included extensive archival research, and interviews of members of the CCA community both past and present. This version draws upon her work and is specifically edited for length to be included for the diversity and equity webpage.

work in multiple contexts. The school has long had the words “practice” and “theory” inscribed on its official seal, and this points to a long-standing effort to connect what is made in the studio to ideas reflecting broader concerns in the world around them. It is also a vital interest for students and the campus community-at-large to continue to seek new knowledges in their artistic endeavors. We seek students: who want to learn about themselves and the world through the making of things; who want to learn to reflect on that process more deeply; and who want to connect that process to a world that will be hungry for their energy and creativity. Some who graduate from CCA will call themselves artists, designers, illustrators, architects, or craftsmen/women, but others will also find their creative work as teachers, as entrepreneurs, and civic leaders. This is the vision of a liberal arts education at an art college that is not confined to the narrow spaces of the gallery and museum. It is a vision of arts education open to diverse constituencies, one that *incorporates* diversity in the broadest sense to fully accomplish its mission of shaping our cultures through creative work.

Foundations for Diversity

The history of diversity at CCA falls into three time periods: 1907-1964, from the attention to working class culture to the founding of the first Black Studies course offered; 1965-1989, from the founding of the Black Studies program at CCA to the contemporary definition of diversity in post-secondary education; and from 1990 to the present, a period of focused development in the College’s history and future of diversity and equity in a global economy. In these periods, diversity and equity was embedded in the founding of the college, in the faculty who serve the students and the community, in our rigorous and challenging curriculum, and most important of all, in our students who constitute the most important asset in

the CCA community. Throughout the College's history, the values of diversity, equity, and social justice remain a constant and important source for change, creativity, and social responsibility.

1907-1964

I. Social Inequality and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The College was founded as the School of the California Guild of Arts and Crafts in 1907 by Frederick Meyer, Laetitia Meyer, Perham Nahl, and Isabelle Percy. The name was changed to the California School of Arts and Crafts in 1908, and finally to California College of the Arts in 2003. One of the founders, Frederick H. Meyer, a German-born craftsman, was greatly influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement.² Meyer first immigrated to the United States in 1888, and worked as Art Supervisor for the Stockton Public School. There he began to see the need for an education that would provide artists, artisans, and teachers with an education that balanced practice with theory. He believed deeply in Morris's precept that beauty should be part of daily life for every person, not simply those who could afford it. In doing so, American society could be greatly improved. The primary vehicles for Morris's ideal of art and life harmoniously joined were furniture, glass, textiles, ceramics, or crafts, and architecture. Morris's success in making the production of fine crafts respectable created a new way of thinking about and a new respect for the role of artisans in relation to the fine arts.

The philosophies influencing the Arts and Crafts Movement embraced makers and consumers of all classes, particularly the working class. Not only was the movement a return to traditional arts and crafts, but also a radical critique on industrial capitalism, mass production, and mass culture that led many to believe that values such as worksmanship, craft, artistry, and creativity were lost in this age of industrialization. Central to this critique were the ways in

² For more information on the social and political importance of the Arts and Crafts Movement, see ... ???

which the division of labor exploited the working class as disenfranchised workers and passive consumers instead of creative makers and skilled producers of culture. In other words, industrialization was to blame for many of the social ills that particularly affected the working class. Thus, Meyer's vision for the college as a movement for art and social reform of class inequality laid the foundation for the earliest principles of diversity that have shaped CCA since then the college's inception.

II. The Practice of Diversity: Xavier Martinez

Serving as the originator of the Fine Arts Division, Xavier Martinez, considered one of the College founders, joined the faculty in 1909. The founders formed an international group of artists, designers, and teachers committed to Meyer's purpose to bring high quality art and design to all parts of American life.

Xavier Martinez is a central figure in the College's early history. He was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and began to paint and draw when he was ten years old. Martinez attended the university in Guadalajara, but did not graduate, choosing instead to focus on his art, and in 1893 he enrolled in the Mark Hopkins Institute (now the San Francisco Art Institute). Two years later he left for Paris where he attended the *École des Beaux-Arts*, where he studied with Jean Léon Gérôme. Upon his return to San Francisco, Martinez went to work for an advertising firm in addition to continuing his studio work. Though he was first and foremost a fine artist, his combined fine art and commercial art experience made him an ideal faculty member for CCA. More significantly, he brought to his art and his teaching a deep pride in his cultural heritage, and introduced mural painting into the curriculum. Martinez spent two months on the Hopi Indian Reservation making sketches that he used for the basis of his subsequent paintings. Martinez was

in many ways a romantic character, and his reputation as an artist, his passion for teaching, and the exposure to non-Western European cultures that he gave to his students and colleagues was an invaluable model of what art education was about and what diversity – both global and local – could yield for the College.

III. The “Global” College

The Foreword of the 1922 course catalogue offers what is believed to be the first social insight into the growth of the College and its student body about diversity and equity:

Since the School was founded in 1907, it has steadily gained in enrollment and influence. While its peculiar field has been among the states and nations bordering on the Pacific, the attendance has truly been international. During the past year students have been enrolled not only from twenty-five states all the way from “The Hub” to the Golden Gate but from England, Siam, Java, Central America, Siberia, Hawaii and the Philippine Islands...

In addition, there were Asian American and Latino students from the Bay Area and Central Valley that attended the College in a time when exclusion and discriminatory laws forbade or limited minorities from gaining access to education. With regard to teaching, the Foreword states: “Graduates of the School are now teaching in high, normal and technical schools and universities all the way from Honolulu to New York City.” The Foreword makes several important points: that the College had an international reputation for the quality of its programs and graduates, and that it defined its constituencies as coming from North and South America and Asia. In a time of heightened racial and ethnic tensions in California, the College had one of the most forward thinking visions of access and diversity.

IV. Women at the College

Throughout its history, the majority of CCA students have been women. This is not surprising for two reasons: crafts, despite Morris's efforts, were traditionally associated with women's work, and the emphasis on teaching in primary and secondary schools attracted many young women. As fine arts received greater emphasis, and once architecture was introduced, the College achieved a greater balance between women and men in the student body. Gender equity among the students generally or within majors has generally been acknowledged a story of continuing success.

V. Arts and Crafts and Social Responsibility

Frederick Meyer had several goals: that his students should be able to earn a living from their art whether as teachers or makers; and that art should have a place in daily life. One of the ways in which Meyer achieved his goals was by undertaking projects in the community. In 1918, Meyer gave his students the problem of designing desks for primary school children at Thousand Oaks School in Berkeley. The design was innovative in that it took into consideration both the users, small children, and pedagogy – the desks could be moved together for group learning. Two juries, one composed of teachers and one composed of artists, judged the designs. The final design was implemented and the desks were in service for a number of years. Meyer's commitment to the community, and to the ability of artists to shape society remains at the core of CCA's mission.

In the early 1920s, Meyer undertook a second community design project for the Girls Club of San Francisco in which the students worked with girls from the club to make furnishings following designs by the College's students. The project presented both the opportunity to

prepare the students to become practical designers but also to think about how their designs benefited the space and audience.

VI. Veterans and the College

During the First and Second World Wars, there were few male students attending CCA. At the conclusion of both wars, CCA received veterans and set out to accommodate them both academically and socially. During and after each war from World War I to the Vietnam conflict, the College advocated the use of art in occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation. In addition to urging the healing role of the arts, the College developed new majors in wood furniture and glass in response to the needs of veterans returning to the work force. In addition, the College encouraged veterans with an undergraduate degree to enter its graduate programs.

1965-1990

I. The Era of Social Change: Challenges and Progress

In a 1965 report on the state of the College, one of the College's strengths lies "in the fact that the winds of the Twentieth Century are blowing vigorously through the institution, without smothering traditional art. There is a distinct aura of experiment, of individual creativity, which the Faculty apparently intends to inspire, and which is not always found in the more tradition-mounted art curricula in the public institutions." This was the atmosphere in which new courses in the history of art were offered, and in which the first courses in Ethnic Studies at CCA were taught.

Although the College had replaced the European History requirement with two courses, the History of Western Ideas and the History of Eastern Ideas, in 1960 the College's focus in general education remained "western civilization...presented not only in the art history offerings,

but in...philosophy.” The Humanities Department did however, specifically acknowledge the influence of Asian cultures on California. In its annual report, new courses included two in “Oriental Art History” because the program felt that, “by the very nature of the geographical location of the Bay Area as the ‘Gateway to the Orient’ as well as the current oriental influence on contemporary painting and architecture, the problems of Oriental Art History should be understood by the student.” By 1965 upper division courses in Indian and Persian Art, Chinese and Japanese art, and Primitive and Pre-Columbian Art were regularly offered.

In addition to courses in the history of art, the College began two international programs, El Molino, in Erongaricuaru, Mexico, and an exchange program with the Osaka University of Arts in Japan. El Molino was the name of the property loaned to the College. The program provided fifteen to twenty students and two faculty members a “twenty-four hour studio experience” as studio and living spaces were combined. It also offered students the opportunity to study the ancient art of Mexico as well as the contemporary crafts of local artisans. The program was discontinued when the landowner sold the property. The Osaka exchange program existed for two summers and enabled students to study art at the Osaka University of Arts. Both were short-lived, but offered students the opportunity for exposure to non-western art and ideas. Although it does not recruit there specifically, CCA continues to receive applications from students in Osaka.

The College also began to investigate ways to respond to social and political issues. These included the Art and Ecology Field Course held at El Molino that sought to combine ecology with fine arts “in order to gain insight into the inter-dependent relationships of the life processes on all levels,” and courses in Black Studies.

In 1968, CCA defined a new course, *History of the Black Man in America*. The course was developed in response to the changes taking place in the greater society, but also to Black Studies curriculum established at U.C. Berkeley and San Francisco State University. According to the Minutes of the Department of Humanities and Sciences published in the 1968 WASC Self-Study, the course had the following aims and objectives:

- To improve communications and human relations between black and white students at the College.
- To allow a guided confrontation and meaningful dialogue to exist between all students concerning America's most serious internal crisis.
- To further the black student's awareness of his own identity and history.
- To allow the white student to gain a better understanding and awareness of the black man's problems and aspirations.
- To correct one of the inadequacies and imbalances propagated by our present educational system.

The course carried three units of credit and was accepted to meet the social science course requirement. In addition, it was recommended that "all prospective teachers be required to take this course and that the course be offered every semester...." The Visiting Committee's response to the Self-Study described the course as "propitious," but went on to ask, "why not consider other cultural and ethnic groups, and why not relate them all to the development of art, design, and crafts in America?" The College responded by strengthening the Ethnic Studies offerings several years later.

II. Student Activism and Establishing Ethnic Studies and Studio Courses

"Art is about change" as one CCA faculty member stated, and the ability to respond to changes in the larger society, to accommodate new constituencies, and to grow and evolve in order to meet their needs in meaningful ways is an historic strength of the College.

As a progressive institution, CCA questioned its offerings – particularly in General Education (today Humanities and Sciences), and set about determining how to accomplish this through faculty and student “Institutes” in which a set of topics were established and discussed in workshops. In 1960, the Faculty Institute focused on standards for instruction, but in 1969, the institute was expanded to include students and staff as well as faculty. One of the topics for that year’s institute was “Integrity.” Tomas del Solar, Student Body President, and Daphna Yervin and Robert Rainey of the Black Students Union organized the workshop’s agenda.

Questions for the Integrity Workshop discussion included: “What is an art school; what is our art school; What is the school’s relationship to society in general; How are we responding to the needs of the racial minorities within the college; As a school are we providing the optimum for all students, in all respects?” The questions posed in 1969 concerning the school’s relationship to the community, and how it is responding to the needs of the racial minorities within the College continue to have particular resonance.

In 1969, the Integrity Workshop participants stated that they would like “to see strong efforts made to take art into the community and to respond to the needs and inspirations of the community.” As discussed above, this was one of Meyer’s goals though it was focused initially on class rather than on race. In the 1974 WASC Self-Study one of the areas discussed under the heading of “Achievement” was Community Service. It was noted that there was no single office charged with this responsibility, however there were community service projects underway. These included the co-sponsorship of an art center in West Oakland by a church and the Ethnic Studies Department; stewardship of a Nature Conservancy site at Tubb’s Island; design and construction of elementary school playgrounds and equipment by the College’s Environmental Art class; and, the placement of CCA students in community organizations such as the YMCA,

YWCA, and the Alameda County Health Department. Working with the community remains a primary goal of CCA. Pursued through independent courses and projects, these efforts were consolidated into the Center for Art and Public Life in 1998.

The response to the question regarding racial minorities was striking. On the one hand the College was described as “generous” because minority students were exempted from certain restrictions on registration, etc.; on the other hand, there was a fear of tokenism. The notes from the workshop state, “An understanding of the vital significance of minority contributions to the spiritual and artistic life needs to be more widely understood and appreciated. Otherwise, we are in danger of having token minority students and faculty and administration. Black reality and white reality are different, and it is the responsibility of both Blacks [sic] and whites to comprehend and understand that difference. That comprehension is more available to artists than to other members of the community since they share a great deal of the blacks’ alienation from the status quo. In this sense, black liberation is related to the liberation of art.”

The College responded to the need to understand and value difference in several ways: by founding the Black Studies Department in 1970 (now Diversity Studies); by developing Ethnic Studies Studio classes that spoke directly to the purpose of the College (i.e. art making); by 1980 making Ethnic Studies courses and Ethnic Studies Studios graduation requirements of all undergraduates; and by hiring faculty of color to teach both in Ethnic Studies and art/design programs. The founding of the Black Studies program was not without conflict; however, under then President Harry Ford’s leadership the courses were approved because the historical record of the College’s commitment to diversity and equity was paramount. Each of the measures initiated is still in place on campus.

In 1983, the WASC Visiting Committee recommended re-evaluating the Ethnic Studies/Studios requirement. They noted that international students in particular felt it was unnecessary for them to take the courses, and suggested that the knowledge of other cultures could be obtained from other sources. The College responded that while the Ethnic Studies and particularly Ethnic Studies Studios requirements were under discussion, the intention was to introduce students to the “arts and cultures of ethnic minorities in the United States,” and therefore the requirement remained relevant.

In 1984, CCA along with four other arts colleges received a “Ford Foundation Scholarship for Minorities in the Visual Arts” consortium grant. This initiative enabled the College to offer significant assistance to two students per year for three years. The follow up to this grant was CCA’s successful proposal to the Irvine Foundation in 1990 discussed below.

In 1985, CCA added Architecture (including Interior Architecture) to its offerings, becoming one of four art and design colleges in the United States to offer an undergraduate degree in architecture. The program was one of CCA’s first to be located in San Francisco. Architecture together with Graphic Design served as the cornerstone programs when in 1997 the College opened its new campus located at 8th and Irwin Streets in San Francisco’s Potrero Hill neighborhood. With the addition of architecture, the College attracted students who were interested in professional practice, and enrollment grew. The program has been successful recruiting and retaining both faculty and students of color.

Contemporary affirmative action and marketing principles were introduced into the College in early 1980s. There was an effort to hire minority faculty and to focus on recruiting from high schools with traditionally high minority populations. CCA’s financial status, however, were and are directly tied to enrollment, and in spite of the goal to include minority populations

in its marketing strategy, financial considerations necessarily placed an emphasis on broad enrollment over targeted recruitment.

III. Gender and Women's Studies

In addition to Ethnic Studies, in 1971 Women's Studies were also proposed and offered at the College. The College was home to the Northern California chapter of the Women's Caucus of the College Art Association. Although courses were offered, in the early 1980s complaints about the "lack of attention to women's contributions to art and culture in other course offerings of the College" served as a clear reminder that curriculum must be continually reviewed. Currently, unless a course is offered under the heading of Ethnic Studies or Women's Studies, the material taught is at the discretion of the instructor. Perhaps not surprisingly given the College's history, a review of Humanities and Sciences course syllabi indicates that diverse viewpoints are integrated into the curriculum by individual choice rather than by program imposition. This may reflect a tendency for the College to attract faculty members who are empathetic to diversity.

1990-Present

The 1990s represent a time of enormous and concentrated development in the history of diversity at CCA. Prior to the 1990s the concept of diversity was diffuse, but in the 1990s it became focused, in part through the WASC self-study process. Diversity became central to the College's thinking and planning as is evidenced by the recruitment of a ranked chair for the Ethnic Studies program, the development of the Diversity Coordinating Committee, the priorities for diversity outlined in the 1995 strategic plan and subsequent "President Agendas," the 1995 proposal the Irvine Foundation, and the 1998 founding of the Center for Art and Public Life.

I. Diversity Coordinating Committee (DCC)

In 1989 an ad hoc committee began meeting to discuss and establish recruitment procedures including the development of hiring pools, and goals for hiring. In addition this group organized a faculty retreat to raise awareness of diversity issues among faculty and staff. The Diversity Coordinating Committee grew out of the task force established during the WASC self-study process, and in 1992 became a standing committee within the College. Its mission was to “establish a diverse and multicultural population and curriculum in order to stimulate understanding of self and others as expressed through art.” The DCC established the goal of increasing multiracial representation within the faculty, board, staff and students through administration, faculty leadership and accountability. A minority faculty recruitment plan was initiated which resulted in the proposal to the Irvine Foundation to support diverse faculty hires. Between 1992 and 1997 the DCC organized and hosted college-wide symposia, public programs, and exhibitions, including *Odun dé Odun dé: The Global Presence of the African Spirit in Contemporary Art* curated by Faith Ringgold.

The DCC disbanded in 1997. The members of the DCC began to feel that their programs were not reaching those who would benefit most from opening their minds to new ideas. Once it became apparent that all responsibility for diversity on campus would fall to this group of faculty, students, and staff rather than being shared among the entire College, the members of the DCC began to question the efficacy of the DCC in meeting college-wide goals for diversity.

Since 2009, the committee’s membership and mandate was reconstituted to form the President’s Diversity Steering Group under the leadership of President Stephen Beal, Associate Provost Melanie Corn, and Mark Takiguchi, Associate Director of Fine Arts. Consisting of a

comprehensive and representative membership of the College from faculty, staff, student affairs, administrators, students, and alumni, the Committee has worked on and developed wide-ranging strategies and proposals on curriculum changes, faculty and student retention, community programming, and administrative initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and social justice at CCA.

Conclusion

Although a specific consciousness of racial and ethnic identity did not come of age at the College until the late 1960s, the culture of new ideas and the embracement of social interactions with people from all walks of life has been present since the College's founding in 1907. This has created an environment in which the late-20th century concept of diversity in all of its forms can flourish. The need to look beyond the *status quo* was understood as early as 1907: the presence of women among the College's founders and first trustees, the presence of Asian American and Latino students who attended CCA and received scholarships from 1907 to the present, the response to social change resulting in new majors to accommodate World War II veterans, and new classes to reflect changing political and academic contexts (such as *The History of the Black Man in America* first offered in 1968). In examining its history, CCA has had the most success in maintaining gender, sexual orientation, and age diversity among students, faculty, staff, and trustees and is our strongest accomplishment. These historical moments laid the foundation for the College's work on diversity, equity, and social responsibility. They are the very reasons why the work continues today.

CCA provides students a community to find their individual voices in art, design, and architecture, as they learn about the history of visual culture and its place in the contemporary world. The College offers an education for a life of creativity, a reservoir of experiences that will

allow its graduates to engage with the world in productive, meaningful ways. At this point in our history, we are reinvigorating our curriculum as we have an opportunity to enliven our faculty and expand our student body and the resources we offer. At the same time, our presence in the community has never been greater, as more and more people turn to our programs and exhibitions to enrich their experience and to deepen their thoughtful sensibilities. As CCA strengthens curriculum in the arts, conceived most generally, and broadens curriculum in visual and humanistic culture, conceived most globally, we will be well placed to make significant progress in increasing the diversity of our constituencies who look to the College for the insight and the delight of contemporary art.