

# Curriculum "Materials" with a *Pulse* by Bonnie Biggs



## The Beginning

In 1989, Cal State San Marcos was the newest comprehensive university in the nation. Its 12 founding faculty set out to develop a mission statement and curriculum and hire additional faculty in time to admit students for the fall of 1990. No small task, this. The founding mission statement pledged to turn our students into good "global citizens" and to teach them how to celebrate and embrace other cultures. The "confounding" faculty, so-called because they perplexed the more established founding faculty, were attracted by the altruistic nature of the founding mission and came from all over the nation, bringing with them their own unique vision for a university of the twenty-first century. Given the small staff size of the fledgling university, a librarian with a background in arts programming took the initiative and developed a modest series of concerts and art exhibits with the express intention of drawing the public to the new institution, developing a reputation as an arts venue in rural north San Diego County, and creating a sense of community among the university's pioneer staff and faculty.

Arts programming took a curricular left turn with the arrival of the university's founding arts faculty member, who brought with him a view that the arts, more than any other discipline, have the intrinsic ability to unify people across cultures and sociopolitical boundaries and at the same time, create a healthy friction that might force participants to question their assumptions and established belief systems. Dr. Donald Funes, Ph.D. in Baroque flute performance, had our founding president singing along with Andean folk songs the first week he was on campus. He quickly taught us to be activists when we listened to music or observed art, and he proceeded to recruit faculty who were on the cutting edge of the arts world.<sup>1</sup> Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) faculty quickly embraced the existing small arts and lectures series and the alternative venues available at the new university's temporary site. They developed a requirement for all VPA students to attend 10 arts events per semester, encouraging students to avail themselves of the university's series. Since the Global Arts Program was multidisciplinary, visual arts faculty approved attendance at concerts, and theater faculty encouraged attendance at exhibit openings. The permanent nature of the assignment, combined with the philosophical intent of the Instructionally Related Activities funds that the librarian was able to procure to produce the series, formal-

ized her participation as a sort of "bibliographer" of living artists and speakers to support the curriculum of the arts faculty. An artist's database was developed that served as a sort of catalog of "curriculum materials with a pulse."

The arts at Cal State San Marcos would be defined for the next 14 years by this heady beginning. Colleagues at a nearby municipal arts center and a public library gallery, whose programming was constrained by the need to appeal to mass taste, expressed envy for the liberal climate that a university's environment of academic freedom provided for arts and lecture programming. The university's arts series began to reflect the liberal ideals of its faculty as they developed a global arts program that sought to take advantage of the "rich cultural cross-pollination and world fusion that makes Southern California."<sup>2</sup> The librarian coordinator worked hand-in-hand with the faculty as they carved their niche within the university and the regional arts community. There was joy to be shared and blows to dodge as the series became bolder and the artistic expressions reflected the multicultural and social commentary nature of their curriculum.

## Student Learning

Working closely with college faculty, the librarian currently develops and coordinates a diverse series of lectures, concerts, film, performance art, plays, and art installations that reflects the curricular goals of the faculty, typically resulting in 15 to 25 events per semester. Because of this close collaborative work, since 1989 the university has hosted over a thousand artists and lecturers, whose creative and intellectual content link directly to the curriculum. The librarian works with each individual faculty member, regardless of his or her discipline, toward the shared goal of providing information to students that is aural, visual, kinetic, and even visceral in nature. The outcome focuses on enhanced learning and the development of an aesthetic cultural literacy.

The series for a typical semester is comprised of “course materials,” that is, speakers and artists, gathered by the librarian after close consultation with college faculty. The series is designed to provide information in dimensions beyond traditional library practice. For example, over the course of the last 14 years, student learning has been enhanced by the following sampling of visiting artists/scholars:

- The library hosted an art exhibit featuring well-known Chicana artist Yolanda López, whose work explored the exploitation and marginalization of immigrant garment workers in San Diego’s World War II industry. During López’s mini-residency, the librarian arranged for her to visit a “Women Artists in the Twentieth Century” class and a class on Chicana/o history. López’s groundbreaking *Virgin of Guadalupe* series, an investigation of the Virgin of Guadalupe as an influential female icon, is discussed in textbooks studied by students in both classes, so bringing López into the classroom gave life to the textbook/lecture environment of their classroom.
- Julie Dash, acclaimed director of *Daughters of the Dust*, came to campus to discuss clips of her film. She met with film students and students studying African-American history. The librarian arranged a dinner meeting with interested members of the campus community. Dash was extremely generous with her insights and time spent with this enthusiastic group of students and faculty.
- Thanks to a partnership with a local arts institution, the librarian was able to bring Rachel Rosenthal, one of the key founders of the performance art movement, to meet with students in the Process of Art class and a theatre production workshop. A handful of students in these classes had the distinct honor of performing in Rosenthal’s improvisational piece that night at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

The musical offerings reflect a curriculum that is multi-genre in nature in terms of the equal assignment of importance to world and western European “art” music. Each semester, the librarian works with music faculty to develop a series of concerts that will bring in-class lectures to life. To support the instructional goals of professors who teach Music and Culture in the United States, Critical Listening, Survey of World Music, Survey of World Folk Songs, Survey of World Popular Music, African Music in Dispersion, Latin American Music, and Society and Andean Music and Culture, to name a few, the librarian has coordinated hundreds of concerts over the years. The concerts have featured Scottish bagpipes, Chilean instrumentalists, blues, Cuban *bata* drummers, a Paraguayan harpist, Javanese gamelan, a Near East Ensemble, an indigenous *didjeridu* musician from Australia, Japanese Taiko drummers, a *Messiah* done by the San Diego Master Chorale, a tribute to John Cage, a gospel choir, contemporary and mainstream jazz, African *souskous*, Andean indigenous music, Chinese zither, Japanese *koto*,

and many more, including the usual choral groups, string quartets, brass quintets, and piano soloists. Student reports on these concerts repeatedly comment on how the “forced” exposure to these new music offerings opened their minds about a culture or a form of musical expression. Many students report that they now seek opportunities to explore new forms of music through concert attendance.

Faculty in the arts, humanities, and social sciences soon established a tradition of including Arts & Lectures events in their syllabi. The librarian was always delighted when she noticed that students who were attending events were taking notes, indicating that they were required to submit reports on the series, and they often had the Arts & Lectures brochure hole-punched into their notebooks. The library had become an integral part of their instruction. The series garnered considerable faculty support. Faculty responded enthusiastically to the librarian’s semiannual request for input into the series. The faculty input for speakers and artists quickly outstripped the librarian’s ability to coordinate a season’s series with Instructionally Related Activity funds. In order to meet the many mid-semester requests to take advantage of scholars or artists who were visiting other institutions in the region, the librarian applied for a California State Lottery grant to develop a program entitled ALFI, Arts and Lectures for Instruction. While the Arts & Lectures series was an open-to-the-public, much publicized roster of events, complete with formal brochures and prolific mailing lists, ALFI funding was targeted to in-class performances only. Nonetheless, the ALFI series, in its third and final year (lottery programs are required to find “institutional fiscal support” after three years), has impacted student learning in a significant way. Faculty share student reports that mirror the kind of positive feedback a librarian might receive when she connects a student with the exact information needed to complete a paper or flesh out an argument or learn how to use the library’s resources effectively. Although the librarian continues to field requests for ALFI programming, the university’s budget has fallen victim to California’s fiscal nosedive, wiping supplementary arts programming off the budgetary radar screen for the next year or so.

### Uneasy Art

In the introduction to her book *The Subversive Imagination*, editor Carol Becker notes that “Art refuses to be easy...because it seeks to reveal contradictions and not obfuscate them, art works which should spark a shock of recognition and effect catharsis actually appear alien and deliberately difficult. Art easily becomes the object of rage and confrontation.”<sup>3</sup> The university’s art series has occasionally been the object of rage and confrontation over the years.

San Marcos is a small city of 55,000, set among rolling hills 35 miles north of the city of San Diego. An unincorporated town until 1963, San Marcos was selected as the site for the twentieth campus of the California State University in 1988.



*New World [Women]*



*There Are No Snakes in the Garden*

The university was built on 303 acres of what was previously a chicken ranch, dating back to the 1940s. The rural nature of the region helps to explain the predominantly conservative views of the local inhabitants who, early in the town's history, were likely to come from agricultural or blue-collar backgrounds.

The first art exhibit that stirred controversy was "New World [Women]" by Deborah Small, who later became a member of the faculty. The installation, one of three exhibitions on the colonization of the Americas, resulted in a book by Small entitled *1492: What Is It Like to be Discovered?* The artwork in "New World [Women]" is "adapted from sixteenth-century engravings and woodcuts, as well as from contemporary advertising images, Hollywood films, and children's books. *1492* exposes the racial, economic, and sexual politics of conquest. It foregrounds the names of indigenous inhabitants who resisted the relentless incursions—Caonabo, Hatuey, Anacaona, beginning 500 years of ongoing and multifaceted resistance to colonization."<sup>4</sup> Small, a well-known social activist and feminist artist, was gracious to lend her installation to the tiny, one-room library, located at the university's temporary site. The eight-foot-tall naked women were striking with their wild, flowing orange-red hair. The accompanying text outlined the barbaric, sexist, and imperialist nature of the Columbian invasion. Any casual viewer could not help but understand the political intent of the installation.

Controversy came when a member of the founding faculty, a historian with a feminist background, gave a lecture that happened to take place in front of the artwork. The outspoken professor was abashed that she had to deliver a talk with naked women as a backdrop! The librarian pointed to the literature that provided the historical and political context, but the information was not appreciated. The talk was well received, but shortly after this incident, the library developed a grievance procedure, even though a formal complaint was never made.

When the university moved to its permanent site, the

library took up temporary residence on two floors of an administrative building and continued to serve as the "gallery" space for the university. Anna O'Cain's autobiographical multimedia installation, "There Are No Snakes in the Garden," centered on her childhood in Mississippi and the subtle racist undercurrents in her upper-middle-class family. These were not expressed publicly but hidden in the privately expressed concern about Mississippi's three to one, black to white population. Patrons were intrigued to find an entire Southern garden recreated in the library's entrance nook, complete with latticework gateway, a laundry tub with a fan blowing the smell of Ivory soap about, and earphones where one could hear the stories of O'Cain's grandparents. The controversy came from within the library when the preservation librarian insisted that the straw bales proposed to frame the "garden" be sprayed for potential pests! The artist did not end up using the straw.

Women artists had the corner on controversy during the early years. Helen Redman's "Birthing the Crone: Menopause and Aging Through the Artist's Eye," an exhibit of self-portraits in which the artist explored the negativity that aging in this culture provokes, created a good deal of discomfort on the part of male observers and generated a substantive complaint from a teacher who toured the library with a group of middle-school-aged children during the run of the celebratory, humorous, and in some cases, graphic installation. The librarian talked with the teacher to apologize for the shocking experience but explained that the intended audience was not preteens and young teenagers.

### **Speakers with Forked Tongues?**

Art installations did not get any tamer, but it was speakers who would stir up controversy during the second half of the series' 13-year history. Among the controversial speakers, Kary Mullis, developer of the polymerase chain reaction, talked about his discovery that led to the Nobel Prize but also shared his views on flying saucers ("They exist!") and



the fact that HIV virus does not lead to AIDS (this, to a class of freshmen enrolled in a General Education Lifelong Learning course!). The psychology professor who asked the librarian to bring Mullis to campus was disturbed by Mullis's view on AIDS and voiced his concern. Standing behind the now dented shield of the First Amendment, the librarian reminded the professor about the intellectual freedom principles on which the library and uni-

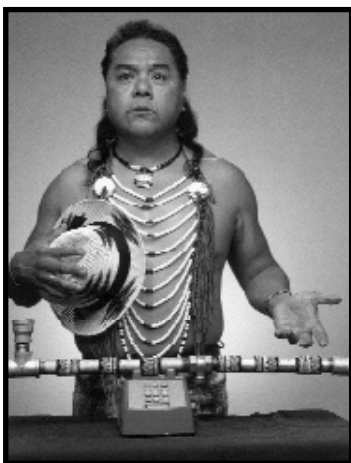
versity were built.

The series brought a variety of distinguished and avant-garde thinkers and performers over the course of the next several years. Among them were Luis Rodríguez, author of *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.*, an exposé of gang life in Los Angeles; accompanying him was an active gang member. The experimental music troupe "THE," from University of California, San Diego, offered a concert that included placing pencils up their noses and blowing into the wrong end of a trumpet. Yareli Arizmendi's satiric performance art piece weighed in on the North American Free Trade Agreement. Poet Quincy Troupe read on "Borders: The Politics of Inclusion" at a time when U.S.-Mexico tensions were at an all-time high due to unprecedented illegal immigration rates. Luiseño Indian performance artist James Luna offered an explosive performance piece that



raised questions about the commercialization of Indian culture and spirituality, and Sundance Film Festival finalist Zeinabu Irene Davis's experimental film *Compensation* explored both Deaf and turn-of-the-twentieth-century African-American culture. All fostered learning and sparked community interest and engagement.

One speaker who raised particular concern on the part of the community was



the Olympic champion John Carlos, who spoke about the 1968 Olympics, which featured his famous gesture of protest, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Carlos's lecture was filled to capacity with students required to attend from classes in history, sociology, race relations, education, political science, and the arts. Students were thrilled to have an audience with the man whose image had appeared in multiple texts throughout their education. Carlos also met with a group of at-risk high school students in the "Brothers, Sisters Gonna Work It Out" program, organized by our student outreach department. Carlos's presence deeply affected the young people and proved to be one of the most popular cross-disciplinary events from the perspective of both students and faculty. The community, on the other hand, was incensed. One white community member commented, "My race and my generation are disgusted that you would have this man on our campus!" Clearly, the San Marcos community felt that the university was not reflecting their values by sponsoring the series. Just as clearly, the faculty and students felt the opposite.

The series has been the topic of conversation and controversy during the tenure of two presidents, founding and current, as well as half a dozen academic vice presidents. Commentary has not always been specific, and complaints have not always been targeted at a particular speaker or artist. Early in the university's history, images from arts events were used in the campus catalog to illustrate the fact that the new university was developing a campus culture. Members of the community complained that the catalog was fraught with depictions of ethnic performers and that this gave a false and inappropriate profile to the campus. Later, a community member complained to the new president, "Indians beating on drums and blacks banging on bongos is NOT culture!" On occasion, the librarian has been asked to address members of various groups—the University Council, the President's Cabinet, the Provost's Council, the University's Trust Board, and the Academic Senate—to explain (and sometimes defend) the series, its underlying philosophy, and the resulting roster of events.

### Taming the Wild Beasts

The great young painters of the early twentieth century were dubbed the Fauves (the wild beasts) because of their use of bold colors and distorted figures. The works of Cézanne, Gauguin, and Matisse are now assigned the term "classical" in the arts. The premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* was met with public outrage and is now hailed as a celebrated piece in symphonic repertoire. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, now considered a masterpiece of modern literature, was banned as obscene when it was published. A form of "visual," "aural," "cultural," and/or "political" literacy develops over the course of one's life, and this literacy cannot help but undergo a form of fine-tuning or tweaking in a university setting. What role does the university play in providing a context for these skills to develop, and how can librarians augment the learning curve?

In the case of the university, it is certainly the role of the administration to support the faculty who promote learning within the diverse marketplace of ideas that characterizes the academy. A mission statement that underscores a set of values to support intellectual freedom is a good starting point. Cal State San Marcos has retooled its founding mission statement, which was abundantly passionate in its commitment to diversity. The new values and mission statement still uphold the basic principles of academic freedom and inclusiveness and shelter the university from what David Trend calls the “conservative assault.”<sup>5</sup> In his book *Cultural Pedagogy*, Trend applauds the efforts of “cultural workers” in colleges, galleries, studios, offices—and, this author would add, libraries—who promote “emancipatory memory, multiple literacies and free expression” over the “view of the arts and humanities that privileges particular forms of history and community over others.” Our young university’s president must straddle a fence that seems to divide the surrounding conservative community and the “wild beasts” whose purview is the curriculum—our faculty. The president is popular in the outside communities even though he faces criticism about the curriculum, arts programming, and faculty members’ viewpoints as expressed through their publications, artistic expressions, and newspaper interviews. One of the measures of his success with the faculty will continue to be his ability to straddle that fence while upholding the principles on which the university is built.

In 1999 the president invited a charismatic regional arts administrator to deliver our keynote commencement address. John Haynes’s words echoed the core sentiment of Dr. Funes, whose vision was the foundation of our arts program: “Arts and culture are indispensable to a stable, just and compassionate society. They’re not frills or hobbies. They are the cry and the moan of humanity, our laughter and joy, our fear and faith wrapped up in a package we can open together... and that creates community. Almost everything else will serve to divide you from one another. But our arts can bridge all the perceived barriers between us. So, I say, harness your left brain to your right. Go out there and commit art! Now... go disturb the Universe!”<sup>6</sup>

If contemporary artists and thinkers are frontline warriors in this battle, then librarians are certainly comrades in arms when it comes to defending the rights of artists to make art and speakers to have their say. Academic libraries certainly have more latitude to promote and defend controversial ideas than public libraries that answer to a board and the general public. Protected by the principles of academic freedom, academic libraries and librarians must recognize and embrace their role as cultural archivists with a moral duty to provide opportunities for the free and unfettered expression of ideas, regardless of the medium in which they are expressed.

Community members attend the events at Cal State San Marcos and continue to ask to receive the brochure. The librarian, when confronted with questions regarding the content of the program, always notes that the series is faculty-generated, and it truly is the purview of the faculty. When asked by the president and provost to program a con-

servative speaker to help quell the community’s outrage over an appearance of Angela Davis, the librarian went to faculty and asked for their ideas for an appropriate speaker with conservative views who would support their classroom instruction. The following series featured *New York Times* columnist William Safire. Just as we collect materials representing a variety of perspectives, so too is it appropriate to balance the scales with this notable speaker.

The library at Cal State San Marcos has an advisory board that is a standing committee of the Academic Senate and consists of elected faculty members from the library and each of the colleges. That group has recently received formal presidential endorsement of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Intellectual Freedom Principles, which it presented to the Academic Senate for approval the previous year. Furthermore, the dean of the library holds deep convictions about intellectual freedom and stands by her librarians and the American Library Association Library Bill of Rights. She honors the sentiment expressed on a poster in the author’s office: “There is something in this library to shock and offend you, to make you question your beliefs and opinions, and to make you angry because it argues for positions you are firmly against. If you cannot find anything in this library to make you angry, or that is offensive to you, please bring your complaint to the management.”

#### NOTES

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4. Small, Deborah (with Jaffe, Maggie). *1492: What Is It Like To Be Discovered?* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991.
5. Trend, David. *Cultural Pedagogy: Art/Education/Politics*. New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1992.
6. Haynes, John A. Commencement Address for California State University, San Marcos. University Archives. San Marcos, 1999.

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