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Manetti Shrem Museum Student Coalition:

Bridging the World of Art and World of Education

INTRODUCTION

Working at a museum has its perks: you are able to be around high-quality art all day long and meet visitors excited to discuss said art with you. However, one question that staff repeatedly get asked is “Are you an art student?.” When the answer is no, there is a switch inside a visitor’s head labeled “Expertise” that flips from 100 to 0. However, unlike what many people would believe, you do not have to be an art student to be working in a museum. This lack of title does not make you less credible. This is the same for students on campus: you do not need to be an art student or have a background in art to visit or enjoy the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art here on campus. The museum, having first opened in November of 2016, houses a wide selection of contemporary modern art. It is open to everyone, no matter your major, interest, or experience with art. That is what the museum student coalition exists for, spreading this message of equality and togetherness to the whole UC Davis student body.

The student coalition is made up of Davis students, those already involved with the museum or just involved on campus. They use newsletters and flyers to spread word of events occurring at the museum, how students can get more involved, as well as why students should make use of the museum. These attributes help solidify the student coalition as a discourse community. A discourse community is “a group of people unified by patterns of language use, shared assumptions, common knowledge, and parallel habits of interpretation” (Dilger, 2014). This group involves people working together, using shared knowledge and communication, to achieve identified and defined goals and aspirations. People use unique terminology when communicating with one another in these communities. The student coalition uses terms such as “Third Thursday,” a monthly event planned and organized by members often in collaboration with another club or organization on campus specifically for Davis students. Another word would be “tabling,” having a group of coalition members or museum staff hand out flyers to and answer questions from students in the Memorial Union, or center of campus. Without being a member of the student coalition, one would not know the meaning of these terms.

Additionally, discourse communities also create and use specific genres of writing when completing their mission. Genres are “types of texts that are recognizable to readers and writers, and that meet the needs of the rhetorical situations in which they function” (Swales, 1990). Genres that the coalition uses would include educational newsletters, written by Elizabeth Yvette Quezada, the Coordinator of Student Engagement, and applications for the coalition, which are available online and in the museum’s lobby.

The reason why I wanted to explore what the student coalition stands for is that as a member of the Visitor Services team at the museum, I have had the pleasure of seeing firsthand

the wonder and joy the museum brings to the students that visit. I would like to know more about what part the coalition plays in the museum's success and campuswide dispersal. Through this paper, I hoped to answer exactly how the student coalition works together to spread awareness of the museum's existence and the resources it provides as well as why this role they play is crucial to the success of the museum and the benefit of the university community.

METHODS

I conducted an interview with Elizabeth Yvette Quezada, the Coordinator of Student Engagement at the Manetti Shrem Museum. She has been working there for over 2 years now, since before the museum opened and the coalition came into existence. Originally, she was a student employee on the Visitor Services Team, but after graduation in the spring of 2017, began working in her current position. I met Liz when I was hired as a part of the same Visitor Services Team in 2017. She heads the student coalition and was able to provide in-depth and detailed answers to my questions regarding the purpose and importance of the coalition and the museum.

Interview Questions	
How long have you been involved in the community?	How would you say you mainly communicate within the coalition?
What kind of content is sent out in the newsletter?	What does a typical meeting look like?
What would you say are the goals and values of the coalition?	What methods do you typically use for going about bridging the gap between the coalition and student population?
What is the significance of having the coalition be made up of students?	How would you explain why the museum is an important fixture on campus?

RESULTS

In regards to the main purpose of the museum student coalition, Quezada called the coalition a “bridge between the museum and the university, or student community.” The coalition’s role is help come up with ways to better inform and educate other students about the museum and the many resources it offers (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). She explained that the coalition’s role is why it’s “really important to have students be a part of the coalition,” as she alone does not “represent the demographics of the university.” Unless the coalition has members from all areas of campus, it cannot accurately represent the entire student population. Consequently, Quezada discussed her excitement for fall quarter as “Welcome Week and the Transfer Fair and the Buzz are all potentials to go out and table and tell people that we have a student coalition. If people are interested in the museum, art in general, or just curious, we’re able to say ‘great, well, we’re a resource for you’.” Tabling is essentially recruitment for the coalition as well as for the museum’s audience (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). While tabling, the museum provides “flyers and an interest list for students to sign up for so they can receive MailChimps with information about what events are happening here and when student meetings are and links to all of those” (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). MailChimp is essentially how they send out the monthly newsletters, which are created by Quezada. She described their content as “mainly reminders of what events are going on here (the museum) and images and graphics as well as a call to action.” For example, when the museum hosted an open mic night, Quezada informed all the recipients on the mailing list that “if they were, or knew someone that was, interested in performing, this is the contact information” and provided her phone number and email.

DISCUSSION

Achieving Goals

The coalition's main purpose is to bridge the gap between the museum and student community (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). This would be the main "communality of interest" of the discourse community that is the student coalition (as cited in Dilger, 2014). Having a group that actively and constantly works to connect these two is important because the museum, sitting a 25 minute walk away from the center of campus, easily goes undiscovered and unnoticed. But, it is something that students of UC Davis do not want to miss. The museum provides many resources for students: gender neutral bathrooms, electrical outlets, cheap coffee, student programs and events, art exhibitions, and a quiet study space, all for free! The coalition, by acting to spread word of the museum to the student community, is striving to have more students learn of and be able to use these resources.

The coalition represents "participation" and "activation" of the museum's goals (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). When you are being informed of something, would you rather be reading blocks of text online or on a printed paper or be told the information verbally by a passionate and enthusiastic member of the community? Members have your automatic authority and trust, and their eagerness and excitement to relay information to you is infectious. That is why the coalition participates directly with the community, communicating with students through tabling around campus. They hand out flyers relaying information about the museum's events and exhibitions and engage students in different games and activities. An example of such a game, geared towards getting students involved, would be where a student would put plastic hooves on and try to pick up a hamburger made of wood, touch their chin, and

put it back down without breaking it. The connection between this game and the museum was there was a video in the current exhibition that provided a parallel between the lives of the students and the lives of the animals on campus. The importance of having these intriguing and silly challenges is to help students remember the museum and hopefully foster a desire to visit either for the first time or again.

While tabling, the coalition also provides an interest list for students who want to receive information on the museum's future events and exhibitions. The people on this list, as well as members of the coalition, receive monthly newsletters containing when events are happening, reminders about coalition meetings, and other ways to get involved at the museum. Since the audience is the student community, the tone is casual and second person is used to make the reader feel personally wanted. It is written as if the writer is having a direct and in-person conversation with the reader so the vocabulary is on par with friends having an intellectual discussion.

Importance of Student Voice

The coalition is also important because it provides students with the power to voice their opinions and suggestions for what the museum should do. The museum's role on campus is a space for students, with its many electrical outlets, coffee, and quiet yet friendly atmosphere. The events and exhibitions are geared towards students' enjoyment and participation. Third Thursdays often have student-run clubs and organizations give presentations and have fun activities for others in the community to learn about what their clubs do and how they can get more involved. This allows students to share what they are passionate about in a safe and supportive environment. The coalition contributes to the museum's role as their meetings are

often a space for members to brainstorm ideas and discuss the pros and cons of these thoughts. Quezada points out, “The museum wants to know what students want to see from the museum, and the coalition helps us in this way.” If the students are the main audience, then they should be able to get involved in the designing and creating of what goes on at the museum. They can be both behind and in front of the scenes. That is why part of the coalition’s job is to inform students of what abilities they have to be part of the decision-making and brainstorming process. By reaching out to students and inviting them to join the coalition or at least visit the museum, they are enlarging the group’s representation.

Quezada notes that by being a part of the coalition, students are free to “be as creative as [they] want, however [they] want, in different realms.” During meetings, members have brainstorming sessions where they project ideas and discuss what students want to see from the museum. They also execute Quezada’s planned events, such as the Ice Cream Social, the April Third Thursday. The impact of this event on the student community could be seen by the threes of people that showed up for the free ice cream. However, they remained at the museum for hours, enthralled by the Thiebaud exhibition, cake-creating activity, and comfortable lounging space. Quezada explained, “I heard one student tell her friends while leaving the social, ‘You know what would be really fun here? Doing your homework.’” The student’s excitement represents what the coalition hopes to achieve by planning and putting on events like the Ice Cream Social. They want students to visit, see what the museum has to offer, and then come again.

How the coalition decides what happens during each meeting is with an agenda, created by Quezada and distributed to the members the day of the meeting. One concept of a discourse

community is its methods of communicating. Swales describes this when he writes, “A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members (Swales, 1990). The agenda is one way that Quezada communicates to the other coalition members. Other ways include through the newsletters and the student coalition applications which help the coalition reach out to the public. Applications are formatted similarly to the newsletters, using casual and friendly diction as well as second person point of view. This genre provides students with a description of what being in the coalition entails as well as why you should join and how to do so. It also includes information on how to contact Quezada and the museum itself. The museum is designed by students for students (E. Quezada, personal communication, 2018). Therefore, students need the opportunity to voice their interest in being a part of this discourse community and putting their thoughts and opinions on the museum into action.

CONCLUSION

The Manetti Shrem Museum Student Coalition’s goals and values embody the spirit of the museum: educational, welcoming, and full of life. The coalition exists to inform the student community of the multitude of resources, activities, and exhibitions the museum has to offer. Since the museum is both new and somewhat difficult to find, the coalition’s outreach is crucial to getting students involved. Additionally, the museum is a space designed for, and by, students which is why it is extremely important for students to have the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions on what happens at the museum. They deserve to be able to personally be a part of the process, and that is what the coalition is for.

Regarding the future of the coalition, Quezada referenced the BAMPFA Student Committee, the student coalition for UC Berkeley’s art museum. Their committee has been

around for much longer than the Davis coalition has and therefore they are able to have a much larger role in the museum's creating and designing process as well as with leadership. In the future, the coalition could take over writing the newsletters as well as create their own zines, which are hand-drawn magazines that would be photocopied and distributed to the student community. Given more time to establish itself as a well-known part of UC Davis, the museum and student coalition would be able to have the finances and opportunities to be able to do so much more.

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