

Public Art, Reclamation, and Social Change Mural Project
Makayla Binter '20 | Davidson College
Davidson, North Carolina, United States | May 2019-August 2019

Project Overview

The Mural Panel Project is an interactive mural that seeks to engage different communities in conversations around social inequality on Davidson College's campus and stems from a personal interest in public art and social change. This reclamation project focuses on topics, identified by the student body, that are problematic to an inclusive environment. My project aims to promote reconciliation, healing, and dialogue about Davidson's historical past, racially tense present, and future support of the growing college population. Through discourse and interactive art, I hope to facilitate relationship building with students of various backgrounds, social standings, and ethnicities and to create a better understanding of society's influence on disparities seen in communities represented on campus. Fostering these relationships would help unify the campus in moments of shock and fear, and inform students on how to be an ally, where to go for support, and how to express differing ideologies in productive ways.

Context

In Fall 2018, the student body learned that two peers generated anti-Semitic twitter posts that supported the Ku Klux Klan and demonized students of color and Jewish students. In effort to address their concerns, students of color, in tandem with the Black Student Coalition (BSC), held a campus wide meeting to discuss fears, frustrations, and solutions to the onset insecurity and overall discomfort with being on campus. At the meeting, the students created a document, inspired by *Project 87* (a 1984-1985 BSC initiative that suggested ways Davidson could create a more racially inclusive campus). Upon creation of the document, the students organized a rally to share their emotions since the unraveling. Since then, student groups have gathered to create new ideas for projects that highlight the impact racism, xenophobic, sexist, classist acts have on particular student communities.

In campus wide meetings, the student rally, and small peer conversation, I noticed that people from likeminded communities discussed controversial topics that resulted in agreement on the same points. Discussions between likeminded individuals are inherently unproductive because it results in students sharing the same opinions without developing solutions that integrate other perspectives. With change as the end goal, the student body needed to bring more perspectives into conversations like these to reach a true level of accountability and responsibility and an overall cultural shift; this is where my idea for a mural began.

A variety of TED Talks on the impact of public art identify art "as a cultural tool [that] helps humanize and actualize the emotions, grievances, and fears of those who may not have another place to voice their concerns." The speakers believe that public art serves as a tool to build communities and facilitate conversations around difficult topics. The mural will provide a visual reminder of the topics that affect students daily and serve as a physical space to promote dialogue about the issues that impact more than minority student populations. The mural will also disrupt the comfortability of a small liberal arts campus in effort to address difficult topics through a common appreciation, respect, and acknowledgement of artistic expression.

Project Details and Timeline

There will be four stand-alone panels that make up the mural and each panel will highlight different social issues affecting Davidson students. The panels will also include blank spaces of black or white board to write and draw to encourage engagement from various student groups. To ensure the student voice is reflected throughout the project, the team will randomly select a minimum of 500 students to complete a survey that asks for the top four social issues that affect students at Davidson. In addition to the survey, I will conduct focus groups with several student artists to receive input on the mural design. As the panels evolve and other challenging topics become pertinent to campus life, this interactive public art could foster

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reoccurring conversations. Ideally, the mural will serve as a meeting site for differing thoughts and ideologies to interact.

-May-June: Grounds staff member will prepare the plot and build panel structures based on the agreed upon blueprint. Students will complete an electronic survey in May. Prior to that, 25% of completed surveys will suffice for moving forward with the project. Student artists focus groups will begin as well.

-June-July: I will consult with at least 10 artists to discuss mural design features, develop a blueprint of mural design, and assign task to each creative.

-July-August: Artists will begin implementing the agreed upon mural blueprint (drawing, painting, etc). Two of the four murals will be complete before school starts and will serve as a pilot.

Project Implementation Team

In the process of receiving guidance and advice on this project, I have identified staff and community members to facilitate the implementation and success of this project:

-David Holthouser- Head of Grounds Keeping and Campus Maintenance He will serve as point person in creating the structures of the panels; he has experience in creating structurally based student projects.

-Cort Savage and Nina Serebrennikov- Art Department Heads and Professors Both have approved the idea and will help with applications for permanent installation based on the success of the project.

-Sherry Nelson- Davidson Arts and Creative Engagement Board Member She has overseen arts-based community engagement projects and will provide insight on how to continue the project.

-Dr. Garry Bertholf- Africana and English Department Professor, Black Lives Matter Liaison, Commission on Race and Slavery Board Member He has experience supporting student-based projects on social justice and will service as project advisor.

-Bryon McCrae- Dean of Students He has facilitated a mural project on reclamation at his previous college and will provide support and insight as well as promote longevity of this project with assistance with finding additional funds.

-Janelle Dunlap- Community Leader and Creative- She created an Afrofuturistic mural at Johnson C. Smith University and has experience in community outreach and innovation through public art and social justice. She will provide guidance throughout the project.

Sustainability

After project completion, we will present the mural walls to the campus and pilot monthly conversations to gauge level of interactivity and productivity of dialogue. Based on the success of the pilot, a few members of the implementation team will continue to apply for grants to fund the last two panels and support the renewal, evolution, and restructuring of the mural. Campus wide efforts of reclamation of history through the Davidson Commission on Race Slavery will also serve as an avenue to ensure project sustainability, project support, and that conversations on these topics remain at the center of structural change initiatives. The mural will be a continuous reminder of the work that needs to be done within individuals and the community, create a space for the Davidson College community to converse about social issues, and connect world-wide issues affecting communities represented on Davidson's small liberal arts campus.