Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

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Introducing "Tapestries"

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Introducing "Tapestries"

Jane Rhodes

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Tapestries, a journal that was developed by students at Macalester College. Two years ago, Terri Fishel, the Director of Macalester's Library, approached me with the idea to start an on-line journal in American Studies. We received a small grant to plan the venture, and started with a class called Engaging the Public in Spring 2010. I was new to the concept of on-line publishing and Terri was new to the American Studies classroom, hence this has been a learning experience for us as well as the students. From the beginning, the guiding principle was that students should be the key decision-makers—to come up with a concept for the journal, develop its mission, think about what constitutes knowledge and cultural expression, and be conscious of their potential audience. This led to many weeks of discussion and debate, writing and editing, and finally consensus. By the end of that semester, we had a name, mission statement, submission guidelines, and a general theory about what we hoped the journal would be. These students became the core editorial collective; they believed strongly that the journal could be more collaborative and less hierarchical and that diversity of experience and perspective was valued above all else.

In Fall 2010 a second editorial collective was born as Engaging the Public had its second iteration. Among this groups were some of the original collective as well as new students—most were somehow connected to the American Studies department but others brought new disciplinary and interdisciplinary insights to the project. This group spent a lot of time on the nuts and bolts of producing a journal. They learned how to make editorial decisions, layout pages, and solicit and manage submissions. There were days when we thought no one wanted to contribute to Tapestries, but as time passed we were delighted to find an eclectic array of research, poetry, visual arts and commentary arriving on our electronic threshold. During Spring 2011 the final editing and layout has been done by a small and dedicated group—Spencer Retelle, Albert Trank, Kyera Singleton, LaurenElizabeth Johnson, and Nicholas Torres—who met weekly (and sometimes at night and during J-Term) to get the final product completed. Without them, there would be no Tapestries—and that is, of course, the point!

So, dive into Tapestries and enjoy. It represents the hard work, intellectual engagement, collaborative spirit, and commitment to social justice that distinguishes Macalester College students. There will be another Engaging the Public course in Fall 2011 and another issue of Tapestries next Spring. We invite others to join this exciting enterprise.