

Public Engagement Minor

PROGRAM PROFILE

OVERVIEW

The Public Engagement Minor is a four-year curricular pathway that integrates art, real world problems and community partners (called service learning or public engagement) into its teaching curriculum. Students work with community partners to solve and address real, complex problems in our project and problem-based courses. Utilizing project planning and best practice collaborative leadership models, our students take action as citizens, artists and designers.

The minor is a model for interdisciplinary education with an extraordinary pre-professional program, exposing students to skills for a variety of careers in nonprofit and educational organizations, art institutions, graduate study, and expanded notions of entrepreneurial studio practice. This program serves as another support for MECA's dynamic curriculum, further engages students and prepares them with professional and interpersonal skills that helps set them, and the institution, apart.

The minor supports the ongoing effort to raise critical rigor and engagement of the student body while fostering interdisciplinary collaborations among students, the institution and community partners. For graduates, professional and interpersonal skills seamlessly flow from work in MECA to work out in the world as creative and social agents.



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OUTCOMES

Public Engagement students will:

- + Learn how to work in a variety of settings and gain professional experience and exposure to a range of careers, fields, and arenas including but not limited to arts administration, nonprofit and educational organizations, community-based teaching and entrepreneurial endeavors.
- + Study and apply problem-based project models. This includes ethics, best practices of community building, appropriate community processes, and skill building for organizing, project planning and working collaboratively.
- + Study the history, theory, models and context of art practice in the field of public engagement, including: public art, community art, collaboration, social practice, and the role of the citizen artist/designer.

SAMPLE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COURSES + PROJECTS AT MECA

COURSE Utopias, Real + Imagined

This course examines various utopias, real and fictional, and societies that give rise to them. Using the utopian ideal as a reference the class will examine how various western societies work and do not work, and how artists and scholars play a role in challenging the dehumanizing effects of modern society by creating utopian idealistic visions like Joseph Beuys's Social Sculpture and dystopian horrors like Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner.

Readings, films and discussions will focus on utopian ideas, dystopian visions and real utopian experiments. Reflecting utopian ideals the class will undertake a public engagement project with a community partner that creatively responds to the content of the course.

Students will address the issue of climate change and western societies influence. In collaboration with a community partner the class will examine many of the imbedded factors of our economic and social structures that are negatively impacting the planet's climate.

COURSE FY-In Portland Harborwalk: You Are Here

The goal of this project is to build public awareness about the vital importance of the Gulf of Maine to the city of Portland, Maine. This

project will partner students with local artists and designers as well as Portland-based organizations dedicated to environmental stewardship.

The project will take the form of a public-art installation along Portland's waterfront. It will be modeled off the collaborative "You Are Here Toledo Project" which affixed 100 unique 3-foot circles throughout the city, which were illustrated by local artists and linked by QR codes to a project website. In a similar manner, this project will use the sidewalk as a platform to spread information about the Gulf of Maine through trivia, dynamic visuals, and open-ended questions. An accompanying online presence will provide further information about the project.

COURSE Woodworking and Furniture Design Independent Project

The issue of global climate change is difficult to avoid in an academic art setting. This is especially true in a place such as Maine, where lives are lived in such close harmony with the natural world. Many aspects of our lives are affected by the myriad changes that occur as a result of these shifts. We will focus specifically on one frustrating, and somewhat confounding

phenomenon: the impact that climate change, pollution, and shortsighted practices can have on Bee populations.

This small class will partner with Jarrett Mellenbruch, professor and MFA candidate, on his project "Haven" (jarrettmellenbruch.com/haven/). As a third generation beekeeper, Jarrett has studied the lives of bees and has devised a system of housing that not only provides places for them to live in public urban areas, but designs them around the natural habitat the creatures are drawn to. Working with Jarrett, this group will partner with the city and/or the MECA Green Space to fabricate and install these pieces of

environmentally conscious and aesthetically lovely bee habitats at locations in Portland Maine, with the hope that they will spread to new sites in the city.

Working with Jarrett, students will explore the problems cited as damaging to bee populations, and assist in creating more hospitable urban habitats for a crucial player in our ecology worldwide. Together with Jarrett, we will start a conversation about nurturing bee populations in a changing environment, and how those populations actually impact our world.

PROJECTS FROM 2012–2013

You Are Here (temporary public art)

This course is an exercise in understanding and interacting with our surroundings. We will focus on designing and making work that not only exists in a place, but also speaks to it and engages with it in a conscious way. What is the difference between "site specific" and "place specific"? How does a broader sense of place impact art and design in relation to itself? These are some of the questions you will ask yourself this semester. So often, especially here at MECA, we plop art down with little consideration of its context. What happens when that context, both immediate and broad, becomes the guiding principle for creation?

Students designed individual art works and submitted them to the City of Portland Public Art Committee. Student works were approved by the city and installed at various locations throughout Portland as part of the temporary public art program.

Provoke the VOTE 2012

MECA students from various departments and disciplines created a visual campaign to inspire the public to participate in the electoral process and vote in the 2012 election. The work in the exhibition included prints, posters, zines, stickers, buttons, video, performance and social media. The exhibition opened on first Friday, October 5 with a special printing and postcard dissemination event led by artist Pilar Nadal and her printmaking students. This special one night only event featured her mobile print device, The Tired Press. The public was able to view the production of letterpress printed VOTE postcards on Pilar's unique bicycle powered printing press. In the spirit of this democratic medium, the finished prints were given away to the public. There also was a make your own political button station led by graphic design students in the Maine AIGA Type Lab, and a performance by sculpture student Rob Doane.

Maine College of Art also partnered with the League of Young Voters to help educate students on voter engagement and trained students in MECA's Public Engagement Minor to register people to vote. MECA alum Shawn Brewer worked with volunteers from the League on his Fast Food Prints, also held at MECA on First Friday, October in the lobby of the Porteous building. Local businesses and community partners provided satellite locations for posters designed by students in the graphic design major.

The Other Side of Shade

MECA alumni Adriana Warner curated The Other Side of Shade, a collection of works that interpret and reflect the issues of race,

oppression and power. Using a range of visual strategies from subtle to controversial, the artists in the exhibition bring the challenging and often uncomfortable issue of race in America to the surface. The Other Side of Shade used the format of the exhibition to bring people together to discuss these complex issues with the goal of creating awareness that leads to positive action. The exhibition was part of a larger project and community partnership between Maine College of Art and the NAACP Portland, MLK Youth Fellows. Students, faculty and staff from both organizations will collaborate on curriculum, workshops and visual projects that respond to the ideas in the exhibition.

Art for Social Change In this course students collectively learned about the history of what it means to directly create social and public change through a creative practice. Artists/Designers as activators, citizens and future change makers were both presented and researched. Vocabulary and practical work methods were investigated.

Yankee Swap Pop Up Shop

Using community service as currency was the concept behind the Yankee Swap Pop Up Shop on Free Street at MECA. Students donated their art to the pop-up-shop and buyers traded volunteer time for the work created. The one-night-only shop sold handmade goods and art created by MECA students, purchased in exchange for volunteer time.

Gathering Influences: Collecting, Collections, Collectors, Collectibles

Students will explore the human instinct to collect with specific attention to the impact of what artists collect on what they make and of what they make on what they collect. Students will share and explore past and/or current collections; develop new collections to generate sources for their work; and begin or continue to collect the work of their peers through barter.

The class became a community art project at Bayview Heights affordable senior housing community in Portland. MECA students and Bayview seniors met to discuss the objects we collect and why we collect them. Students prompted conversation and shared their individual collections through handmade zines, and the students created collagraph prints inspired by the seniors collections. The finished prints were framed and donated to the senior center.