Sample proposals: Pitt’s Undergraduate Conference in Literature

Proposal for an individual paper:

From Rabbits to Reflections: Mulan and Cross-Cultural Girlhood

Technology needed: Powerpoint

This project examines constructions of girlhood from a cultural perspective through an exploration of the character of Mulan in both the Disney film Mulan (1998) and the Chinese folk poem, "The Ballad of Mulan," (circa 1000 A.D.). In both narratives, Mulan disguises herself as a man to replace her father in the Chinese Army against a battle with the Huns. The Disney character has been lauded as an unconventional heroine in the United States, while in China, Mulan often represents an ideal filial daughter. However she is interpreted, Mulan is always held up as a model for young girls to emulate. In this paper, written for my Senior Seminar titled Constructing Girlhood, I take a closer look at the model of Mulan as it is re-drawn and analyzed in both America and China. To do this, I have examined materials related to Mulan in both English and Mandarin Chinese: Disney's Mulan, "The Ballad of Mulan," Saga of Mulan, a Chinese live-action film retelling of the story released in 1995, and academic analyses of Mulan in her various guises from both countries. My analysis explores the character through four key issues: becoming a socially-acceptable woman, becoming a man and male-female equality, Mulan as a daughter, and the trope of "finding yourself." My argument both challenges the notion of girlhood as universal and timeless and questions the alternate position that girlhood must be limited and controlled within the boundaries of national culture. It looks at the ways in which images of Mulan offered and debated over in the various sources both limit and open up possibilities for girlhood cross-culturally.
Proposal for a group of students whose papers are connected (called a panel):

Note: the committee substituted the presenters’ names with “presenter” in this proposal. For your own group proposal, please specify each presenter’s name.

Group Proposal: Re-presentation and Appropriation of William Blake’s Works in Illuminated Printing

Technology needed: digital projection capability

William Blake’s innovative method of producing his illuminated prints restricted the circulation of his works in his own time, and since then his art has often appeared either in very expensive facsimiles with a limited audience or in standard typographic formats that fundamentally alter what he was trying to accomplish. Yet many recent artists working in various media have emulated some aspects of Blake’s verbal-visual art, and have brought those aspects or influences to a broad audience. This panel will investigate how Blake’s works in illuminated printing have been edited, re-circulated, and newly appropriated in recent years, and will discuss some ways these new uses of Blake can highlight interesting qualities of the original works in illuminated printing.

Presenter 1 will speak on the ways Blake is now most readily available to people through the web and through textbooks. Looking at several internet sites, especially the Blake Archive, she will investigate what is lost and what is gained by this new media transformation of Blake as she herself uses new media formats to elaborate her findings.

Presenter 2 will examine some graphic novelists who have claimed inspiration from Blake’s illuminated works. This influence is expressed not only in the joining of illustration and text, but also in the composition of pages, philosophical issues displayed, borrowing of characters (such as Urizen), and even in the use of Blake as a character.

Presenter 3 will explore Blake’s influence on Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan as part of her consideration of the role or stance of the poet-as-prophet.

Presenter 4 will use Brazilian artist Guilherme Marcondes’ video interpretation of “The Tyger” as a place to explore the effects of media translation on Blake’s art and ideas. He plans to print images as an “illuminated companion” to his analysis.

Though each of us will read a brief presentation of our individual works, we imagine this panel as a roundtable opening up some of the issues under discussion in our ongoing senior seminar.