

## **'Info-graphic' Students Eye Educational Equity**

For senior nursing major Stephanie Olivares, the class is a revelation as to how crucial art is in all levels of education as a means to communicate and relate.

“I’m amazed about how much I have learned about my fellow classmates -- both high school and Dominican students -- from self-expression through visual art. The intimacy, connectedness, and community that I feel with my classmates are something I have never experienced,” Olivares says. “Through art we have gone beyond the surface and got to know deep things about each other. I realize that although the students from Canal Alliance and Next Generation Scholars come from a completely different background than I, we share a strong passion for education and love for family and friends. By realizing our differences and finding out our similarities we all work very well together.”

The project is the final of four this fall semester as part of a Dominican colloquium called “Beauty in the Struggle: Critical and Creative Engagement for a Living Democracy.” The course is taught by Lynn Sondag, chair of the [Art, Art History and Design department](#), and philosophy professor Julia van der Ryn, director of [Dominican’s Service-Learning program](#). Dominican students have been working alongside teenage students, all children of immigrants, to develop relationships and share ideas for the art projects. The first, Personal Terrain Silhouette, merged personal identity and place into visual stories. The second, Big Question Prints, engaged the power of question into transparent overlay, and the third, Visual Statement, enabled their voices to be heard through posters and t-shirts in a silk-screening process.

The projects resonated with Dominican senior Michelle Bernard and helped her narrow her focus from design to arts. She is now considering pursuing her Masters in Arts Education.

“While imagination and curiosity are very important in an art class, they are also essential in our growth as individuals living in a democratic society,” Bernard says. “When we are curious, we imagine solutions. We imagine a better future and paint a glorious image in our minds. By doing this, we become the artists who visualize the change. Democracy, education, and the arts all flow together.”

The Info-graphic project is more impacting than Sondag expected. The class has met twice a week and shared their personal experiences.

“Info-graphics are a very appealing way to tell a story. You are organizing information graphically,” Sondag says. “This project not only involves the creative process, it also utilizes visual language, and visual thinking skills. As a final project, we thought it would be a great way for everyone – all the students, high school and Dominican – to culminate their research, conversations and experiences into a complete, concise message.”

Building relationships and trust through the first three projects, high school students identified their concerns and shared their perspectives.

“They are the experts,” van der Ryn says.

“This allows the students to feel their agency, the power of looking into something in order to raise awareness and action to change. Or create strategies for overcoming these challenges or issues,” Sondag says.

It is the third service-learning related course Bernard has taken at Dominican. She appreciates the opportunity to connect with the high school students and learn more about their experiences. She was inspired by their desire to be the first in their families to attend college.

“If it weren’t for this class, I don’t think I ever would have had the chance to meet the high school students, mainly because of the age gap between high school students versus college students,” Bernard says. “I tend to be a bit quiet in social situations with people that I don’t know, but this class has forced me step out of my comfort zone and become a leader.”

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