

LARC Grant Rationale and plan of work for the research community: (511 words)

Columbia River Estuary & Willamette's Liberal Arts Research Community (CREW LARC)

Michael Strelow & David Craig

Thematic, theoretical methodological intersection: Our research community plans to create original work by mixing our diverse interests and expertise in natural history, creative nonfiction, studio art, and ethnographic study inspired by shared experiences in and around the world class mixing that is the Columbia River estuary. Professors Mike Strelow (fiction) and David Craig (biology) and students Erynn Rebol (studio art), Sarah Greiner (ethnography) and Gunnar Paulson (fiction) will thematically center work in estuaries because they are the richest biomes on earth and as such attract birds, animals, fish and humans, all in search of sustenance. Our team will engage in group work looking closely at the current and historical complexity of the estuary including the political, economic and social dynamics created by contentions over various estuary resources, but especially salmon and especially with attention to changes in climate.

In so doing we join the community of contending interests that include high profile conflicts between the Audubon Society, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Dept., Columbia River InterTribal Fish Commission, Bonneville Power, Oregon/Washington fisherman associations and many others who argue about the relative importance of avian predators (e.g. Caspian terns). We will also join a community of nationally renowned graphic and sculptural representations of the Columbia estuary's energy, shapes, and organisms in sculptures by Mia Linn (e.g. 2006, Cape Disappoint State Park, The Confluence Project) and photographs by Robert Adams (e.g. 1995, West from the Columbia) and paintings by Ram Pappish (e.g. 2007, Lewis and Clark Bicentennial 19052005: Wildlife at the Journey's End). The number of creative nonfiction writers who have been inspired and written about the Columbia estuary in essays both personal and scientific is rich and we expect to draw on the Columbia River work of Robin Cody, John Daniel, Kim Stafford and John McPhee—as models for some of our own essays.

The two faculty members will engage the students in their work at the professional level. Professor Craig's long standing research on seabirds will allow the rest of the group to have camping access to various restricted remote islands busy with scientific monitoring of 22,000 birds in the world's largest Caspian tern colony. Professor Strelow's creative nonfiction writings have engaged this community in one published article and his past published articles and novel included writings about humans and nature (mountain, rivers, wildflowers, etc.). The three students have projects that engage both professors' fields of expertise—artistic rendering of the particular physical aspects of the estuary, the nonfiction essay form, and ethnographic studies of the estuary's peoples. We plan to view the estuary together by boat, small airplane (if funded), car and on foot. We will use WISE as a clearing house for projects in process, writing and reading assignments. Our thematic, theoretical and methodological intersection is focused by the estuary itself. All of us are interested in what the estuary does: feed humans, provide economic livelihoods, involve groups in ideological debates (sometimes wars!), stimulate the artistic senses, and populate the mind with engaging ideas and discourse.