Kirstin “Frankie” Humason

Week 10

3/14/17

Self Eval

This was my first experience with a Student Originated Studies program. This program presented the opportunity to learn how to make a WordPress blog, become familiar with the topic of food justice, and develop the ability to take charge of my own individual learning interests. These interests included learning how to cultivate oyster mushrooms, research the evolution of medicinal properties present in oyster mushrooms, and create an art sculpture reflecting how oyster mushrooms can make a positive difference in dealing with destructive entities such as oil spills.

My focus on the Oyster mushroom as both a medicinal and environmental aid holds a connection to Winona LaDuke’s journey which lead to her book, *The Winona LaDuke Chronicles.* I was inspired by LaDuke’s initiative to stand up and speak out about the harmful impact oil pipeline companies have on the health of people who live near them, particularly the Native Americans she shares her history with. I hope to one day take my passions for saving the environment, and bringing health to people, and apply them to political dialogue the way Winona LaDuke has.

The seminar readings this quarter were certainly challenging. Readings such as *Kyla Wazana Tompkins’ Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* was particularly challenging in its use of language. Tomkins often uses an expansive vocabulary and even makes up new words. This book tested my reading skills as well as my knowledge of food commodities. Reading *Martha Stewart's Living* magazine inspired Tompkins to embark on a journey of understanding the hidden racist, classist and sexist symbolism in food. Up until now I have never considered food a commodity that could hold such potent symbolism and racial history. I never before thought about the suffering and repressions which shaped my subconscious thoughts associated with food. Something that stuck out for me during a seminar discussion was how the colors of a cookie could change what cookie cutter is used. The gingerbread man, symbolising a person of color, and the white cookie taking the shape of an angle.

Kara Newman's book *The Secret Financial Life of Food* showed the financial history of different food commodities in the U.S. Again, I had not previously given much thought to the politics, and especially the financial politics, behind the food I eat everyday. These seminar readings gave me a new perspective of the world around me, and I will never look at food the same way again.

The title of my individual learning contract was Urban Mushroom Farming for Health. My goal for this contract was to learn how to cultivate Oyster mushrooms in an urban setting, write a research paper on the evolution of medicinal properties found in Oyster mushrooms, and create an art sculpture that symbolizes how Oyster mushrooms can benefit humanity.

This quarter, I have achieved all these goals. I successfully cultivated Oyster mushrooms, and even had the opportunity to serve them to the class for my scheduled lunch. I learned the process of pasteurization, sterilization and inoculation of oyster mushrooms. I also discovered that this may not be what I want to pursue as a future career. However, I do plan to keep this new skill as a hobby. There are still areas within this subject that I haven’t yet explored, such as learning how to select good genes and clone them. This would be something interesting to study on my own, in the future.

I successfully wrote a quality research paper on the evolution of medicinal properties of oyster mushrooms. Due to the vastness of my subject, I chose to focus on the single compound of tryptophan. I personally believed tryptophan to have medicinal properties. When learning about tryptophan, my research ended up going much deeper into evolutionary history, and the origins of life, than I had anticipated. I feel this process has really tied together the knowledge I've acquired over the last few years of college, which has focused on evolutionary biology. I feel more confident in my skills of researching and understanding evolutionary history. I found this part of my ILC to be very fascinating, and would like to research it further.

My art sculpture is not fully complete , but it is very close. Like most of my art projects, I underestimated how long it would take me to finish. However, I believe what I have accomplished is some of my best work to date. Part way through the quarter I decided to make my sculpture appear to “jump out” of a painting. I really like this new aspect to the project, which plays with the idea that an art piece can be both two and three dimensional, simultaneously.

My goal was to portray the symbolism of how Oyster mushrooms can help improve upon the destruction humans created on earth, such as oil spills. Research has shown that Oyster mushrooms can help dispose of oil and return nutrients back to the environment. I decided to sculpt an oil spill “monster” being attacked by Oyster mushrooms. This monster is holding a gas pump and has robes painted to resemble melting oil and plastic. The painted portion is a scenic coastline with red stormy weather. What I have left to complete is sculpting the oyster mushrooms growing on, and “killing” the monster. I also want to add sea shells covered in oil spill at the base of the picture frame.

I think that all three of these learning objectives are important because I want to help bring awareness of the importance of oyster mushrooms. In today's society foods are lacking nutrition and are making people sick. Foods such as Oyster mushrooms are a possible way to help people become more healthy. Knowledge on how oyster mushrooms can help heal our planet is very important when trying to find safe ways to fix environmental damage such as oil spills.

My work during the quarter was consistently and carefully documented on my project pages of the SOS WordPress website. I think that this was a huge accomplishment for me. I found the blogging portions of this program to be the most challenging and furthest out of my comfort zone. I am really proud of my blog, and am very happy with this new skill. Out of the work that I posted, I am most proud of my Oyster mushroom updates. I tried to make each post as colorful and interesting as possible. While learning to use WordPress, I gained new skills such as blog writing, and using Zotero. I think I will definitely use both these skills in the future.

Now that I have completed this SOS program, I know how to navigate a WordPress website. I know how to use Zotero, which I think will be very useful in future programs. I have gained a lot of diverse knowledge on Oyster mushrooms which is very beneficial to my personal and community life. I also have more skills in understanding evolutionary biology, which has been my academic focus. I made new discoveries about my computer abilities, which have come a long way. Through this SOS I have refined my time management abilities, which I think will be very important in both my academic and professional life.

Proposed Credit Equivalencies: \_16\_ Total of \_\_16\_ attempted/registered