Dianna Velasco: We've never had a collab like this with the library. So I was really excited about getting the students to participate in the Meme Madness, and getting them introduced to the library was a really cool concept.

Christina Barsi: Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell: And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi: Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell: We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

Angel: And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5: She is a sociology major and she's transferring to CalPoly Pomona. Psychology major, English major ...

Sun Ezzell: From transforming part-time into full time.

Speaker 6: We like that time that we spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi: Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 7: Think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi: We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell: And I'm Sun Ezzell, learning assistance faculty and Professional Learning Academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi: And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Sun Ezzell: Hi, this is Sun Ezzell. In this week's episode we bring you Meme Madness, an amazing collaboration between Professor Cynthia Flores, tutor Dianna Velasco, along with Mt. SAC Librarians Eva Rios-Alvarado and Pauline Swartz, and the Summer Bridge Students.

Sun Ezzell: The goal of this collaboration was to get students into the library and engaged in the concepts they were working with in their multicultural literature class, such as ethnic identity, cultural pluralism, assimilation, acculturation, and gender and family roles, and what better way to do so than create an engaging, fun, and interactive assignment that allows students to learn how to utilize the library's resources, collaborate with their classmates, and have fun competitively creating their very own original memes.

Sun Ezzell: Welcome to Meme Madness.

Angel: My name is Angel [inaudible 00:02:20], and I depicted social constructs as key terms in our multicultural class as an assignment, and in the form of a meme, which is commonly interpreted through our generation as entertainment. And my main for quotes is when you bottle up your feelings because you're a "man", you seem to sometimes self-destruct because the whole construct around a male image is that you have to be tough, you have to be strong, you can't be as expressive as a female can be just because its restraints on the male image.

Angel: But a funny picture of this kid who cooked his noodles, right? And he obviously burned them. So yeah, he self-distracted, he messed up. As a man in like modern generations, we live to be really masculine, and sometimes live in our own stereotypes. But I think since ... In this depiction of mine, I could just make it way more entertaining. Just a picture, express myself. I guess I conveyed that concept through the noodles being burnt, and to me, me just self-destructing like in a personal sense as a man, not being able to grasp many emotional strands in my life. I just depict it as like how it commonly is established for a man or any other man that deals with the masculinity inside of them, the bottled up issues that dwell inside of every man.

Angel: I just chose the kid because he burned his noodles. Obviously he wanted those noodles. I think after creating the meme I felt like it was more comforting to be able to express it. There was something that I so easily understand between like what I grew up with, which are memes. So putting it in a format where it's something that I see every day that's depicted on social media, whether it's comedic or serious like this, I think it makes interpreting it way more easier. Way more comfortable. Yeah.

Angel: I think in a sense of psychology, humor is one of the best ways to comfort through anything, even if it's pain, understanding, not understanding, judgment or anything. Humor is a universal sense of communication that we all understand. So in this depiction it's humorous, it's realistic, it's understandable.

Layla Silva: My name is Layla Silva. We did acculturation, my group, and we basically have to give a definition in a picture that is like entertainment also. So when we look at the word, we see the word and we kind of get a gist of what it means. We have acculturation. It means keeping your same religion and culture but adapting a new one as well. So ours we did like a baseball player and a Mexican singer. So he still wants to sing obviously, but he's also keeping playing like a new sport also, so you don't see that every day.

Sun Ezzell: Have you ever done anything like creating a meme to-

Layla Silva: Actually I haven't, no.

Sun Ezzell: ... understand a word better?

Layla Silva: I haven't, but I feel like this helps a lot. Just so you can understand what it truly means. So I feel like people can use this every day also, because I'm Mexican but I also do certain things that ... Like I still keep my religion and my culture, and I adapt new ones also.

Cynthia Flores: My name Cynthia Flores. I've been a professor in the English department here at Mt. San Antonio College for 14 years, and this is a wonderful summer that I'm spending with the Bridge program. I'm teaching a multicultural literature course, and so I am working with a group of students who are marvelous, and many of them have different skill levels, so I wanted to create an assignment that was going to be fun, that was going to be engaging, and that was really going to get some buy in from the students. So we're in a Meme Madness. What happened was I was collaborating with Eva and Pauline here in the library, and decided that it would be fun to create an assignment that got students into the library, but also got them engaged in the material that we've been working on. And in particular, looking at the concepts in the catalog description for multicultural literature.

Cynthia Flores: I wanted them to be familiar with ethnic identity, assimilation, acculturation, cultural pluralism, and family and gender roles. And we couldn't use all of them, but again, these are terms that we're using throughout the semester. These are terms that we're using in our class, and terms that we're using in the literature. Among other terms, of course. And I wanted them to have, I wanted students to do an assignment where they would have a kind of intellectual flexibility in thinking about the concepts, where they were working with the ideas.

Cynthia Flores: And so in working with Eva and Pauline here at the library, we came up with, "Hey, it would be fun to do some memes," and this is really the language that this generation of students kind of plays with. I know my kids also enjoy memes, and they're always talking about memes, and I think they're funny. We used to do meme-like things, even some of the phrasing. So really, this whole project was about getting students to interact with the content of the course, getting students to apply the concepts to their own lives.

Cynthia Flores: A lot of times when we're thinking about vocabulary and vocabulary acquisition in college, it's also about the conceptual acquisition, understanding certain kinds of terms. Ethnic identity means something particular in a literature course, and then as we move into sociology, it can have another meaning, and I want students to begin that foundational level to have the intellectual flexibility to understand things within each discipline, and also to apply it to their own lives, especially now in the political climate that we're in where students could begin to conceptualize some of the language that's happening in our world today, in our country today, and really have an intellectual approach, as well as their own emotional approach, and have a discourse about the things that we're dealing with.

Cynthia Flores: We've had some wonderful discussions in class about assimilation and the distinction between that and acculturation, understanding gender roles in our different families and questioning the constructs, enjoying the constructs, and just being able to have that as part of the way we interact with the world. And so the whole purpose of the assignment, again, was really just to have a fun, interactive, collaborative commentary on the stuff that we're dealing with in class. The stuff, the concepts, the ideas.

Cynthia Flores: My other dream was to have students buy into the place of the library. I'm a big library fan and I really understand that students who use the library really have an asset in their skillset as a student. I think it's really important that we familiarize students with these places on campus, support centers, academic support centers. Libraries, there's puzzles you can do, you can hang out and you can talk to your friends about what you're learning in class and work on a puzzle. You can find a safe, comfortable place to be. There's quiet rooms, there are ear plugs here, there are tons of books, there's databases on the computers. There's so many cool things, and they have a really cool new machine where you can photograph your textbook and put it on your PDF on a drive.

Cynthia Flores: So I just think it's an amazing place, but many of my students have confessed to me that they've never even been into a library, that they don't go to libraries, that it's not a place that they are familiar with, and this was the class that I had this summer. Every summer I take a informal tally, even in the courses that I teach here, and really make it a priority to work with the library, to get students to see that it's really a place that's supportive for them. So that was the kind of idea in approaching Eva and Pauline and saying, "Hey, what can we do this summer?" And this is our brainchild.

Pauline Swartz: My name is Pauline Swartz. I am a librarian, a faculty member in the library. I'm the chair of the library. And this summer we were working with Cynthia Flores' Literature 3 class in Bridge. That's the multicultural literature class. So students were grappling with these heavy terms like assimilation, acculturation, cultural appropriation, so what the library did for this class is a series of three sessions. Our first session was a zombie outbreak, to get them used to the library and have fun here, and kind of give them the layout of our resources.

Pauline Swartz: And then the second session was kind of centered around this assignment that you're seeing here in the window. The students were broken up into four regions, and those regions were terms like assimilation, acculturation, you can see ethnic identity, and family and gender roles. And so the first step was for them to use library resources to find reliable information on their term so they can really understand it, and then they had to come up with an original explanation of their term and tie it back in with what they're learning in Literature 3.

Pauline Swartz: After they understand their term, they represent it visually by designing a meme. It's an informed meme based on what they researched. So we have a bracket tournament going on. The four terms represent different regions of the bracket, and the students were broken into teams usually of two or three students. And so they design this meme, the meme goes on the bracket, and then they have the little stickers that they get in Bridge, and they vote for which meme that they liked the best, and then that meme moves on to the next round. In the end, we're going to have a meme winner.

Pauline Swartz: So what we're seeing in this window, the term is for acculturation and Elon Musk, how are you going to describe that?

Speaker 7: It's that interview he did with whats-his-name where he's smoking a blunt, and he looks totally high, and his face is like he's realizing something really profound. In the top it says, "When you realize that acculturation and assimilation are different."

Pauline Swartz: We talked a lot about that in class. And so I was telling the students in class a story of my mom, who immigrated from Japan when she was in her late 20s, and how she brought some of her culture and how she has kind of had to adapt to American culture. So I was sharing this story with the students and I'm like, "I don't know, is this assimilation or acculturation?" So I gave them a couple of different examples and they were telling me which term it was, and I was like, "Oh, I've been wrong this whole time." So they helped me understand the terms, and I kind of think that this is me, because that's how I feel. I'm same, right here.

Dianna Velasco: My name's Dianna Velasco. I'm actually the tutor assigned to this class, so I come to the class sessions and then I have the students for an hour afterwards, and sometimes I take the lead professor role in the class.

Dianna Velasco: The project was really fun. I think it doesn't happen a lot in college level courses. I think that the fun component gets dropped completely, and I think that it's important to remember that, especially for freshmen coming right out of high school, you still need some sort of fun component in order to keep the engagement going. It encourages students and motivates them in ways that most professors can't even imagine. It gets them excited to come to class, or to come vote for the memes, and it really, it's a huge part of why they continue coming.

Dianna Velasco: Six weeks, a literature course in six weeks, it's a lot of work, and we needed that fun component. I cannot imagine how it would have gone had we not done this Meme Madness. I think it would have been very, very work heavy, a very work/lecture heavy course. But this Meme Madness gave us a break from the lecture. It gave us a break from all of the assignments that they had to do in six weeks, and it gave the students an opportunity to breathe and to just have fun with it.

Dianna Velasco: It was really amazing. It was a great turnout too. We had fun doing it. The students really enjoyed it, and they got a few workshops. They now know, and you wouldn't expect this from a literature course where we focused a lot on like the writing component, finding sources, how to find them, integrating them, and they got a lot out of this class. I want to say that it has a lot to do with the library collab that we had.

Pauline Swartz: So now we're upstairs in the library with Cynthia looking at the Meme Madness. I keep wanting to call it Meme Wars.

Cynthia Flores: There's a little bit of a little competition, a little friendly war. So yeah, we're here looking at these trees. They're visual trees, and basically they're terms of all the student definitions of the assignment. So students were asked to look at the Gale Virtual Reference Library and to begin to work with the encyclopedias in the database, which I think is really helpful for students because a lot of students want to just Wikipedia something or instantly look at an online dictionary, which, unlike the old dictionaries, don't have all the words around them. So what was cool about looking at the Gale Virtual Reference Library is they can pull a lot of terms, they have a lot of different links to them, and that they're in the habit of looking at encyclopedias and not just a dictionary term, which I think is pretty helpful.

Cynthia Flores: So we're looking at these little trees. They've got these little wise owls on them, and on the belly of the owl we have the different terms of assimilation. I'm looking at the assimilation tree, and each of the students have created a little team name for themselves, so we don't really know their identity. We've got Meme Gods, and Watermelon, and the [inaudible 00:15:57]. In the acculturation, we've got Keanu Reeves, Team Keanu, Team Papi Chulo, Team Los Mexicanos. In ethnic identity, we've got Purple Puppies, Team Being-Someone-Else, Team Pasta, Team The-No-Name-Team, Team Ah-Ha-Ha, Team Gender-Roles-of-Green-and-Red-Apples, Team Hazel, and so all these different teams of assimilation, acculturation, ethnic identity, family and gender roles, these are all of the different terms that we've been working with this semester.

Cynthia Flores: What's marvelous is that the students were able to look at the Gale Virtual Reference Library and then understand the terms in their own words, and then create a definition and start to ... Again, they're starting to have an academic understanding of the term. If you notice some of the entries are a little bit more academic and some are a little bit more casual, and students are learning kind of that moment, right? This is their first college course. They're learning that moment of beginning to take on the academic discourse. And so you'll notice that in the first ... For example, in Meme Gods, we'll look at the definition students are writing: "Assimilation is the action of adopting characteristics of a group. These include social norms, language, and psychological characteristics."

Cynthia Flores: And so we'll look at something like that, and then we'll move over to something a little bit more vernacular like, "We both found different articles that, in a way, summed it up pretty well. Acculturation is often confused with assimilation. The two terms are very similar, but the difference is that assimilation is by choice." And so even though in that second term, that it's a little bit more casual, there's a real deep understanding of distinguishing between assimilation and acculturation, and that's pretty sophisticated and that's pretty marvelous, and I think seeing, especially with maybe 705 and the changes that we've seen, that there are many levels of students entering our class now that it's just A1 eligible. And so being able to work with those students, that's one of the neat things about the meme is the actual outcome is visual rhetoric. And so we can begin to have that conversation of how to bridge the content between an academic discourse and then understanding and then a visual meme.

Cynthia Flores: I just think that it's been a lot of fun seeing how students have begun to understand the terms and begin to understand them in a way that's personal to them. I know we had a guest speaker recently at Bridge. His first name was Caesar. The students were really able to use some of this terminology in talking about him and his message later on, and I thought that was really wonderful.

Cynthia Flores: Again, a lot of the material that they're learning in their counseling course is being reaffirmed here, but the fact that they now have these terms to approach and to use in the literature course I think is really marvelous. I know looking at the different terms, ethnic identity, it's such a term that we can just easily throw around, but to really deeply understand that, again, seeing that it's deeper. I'm reading from Team Pasta, and the team writes: "A short way to explain this term, ethnic identity, is the psychological event that takes place in the mind. There comes a period of time when we as people try to figure out what we identify ourselves as, whether it's your sexual orientation, your clothing, hair, et cetera. However, when it comes to ethnic, we try to relate with the dominant culture in our minds. It's almost as if you're transitioning from one culture to another."

Cynthia Flores: So I'm looking at something like that, I'm reading something like that. And again, the discourse is still very much spoken, but it has a depth of meaning and the student is beginning to really understand the deeper concepts of what we're talking about in our class, of the concepts of what multicultural literature brings to us.

Cynthia Flores: I'm looking also at another, Purple Puppies. "What this article talks about is the different examples of ethnic identity. You have facts from different perspectives of different people. The one topic sticks out a lot more is that your identity changes through your time." And so again, the conversation is pretty deep there. The fact that we are conscious about the changes that we're going through, the fact that students are beginning to distinguish that it's not just a term, that it's something to apply to our own lives and our own selves. I think that's pretty profound.

Cynthia Flores: So I'm looking at Team Ah-Ha-Ha, reading, "The construct of gender is a spectrum that I think is hard to understand for anybody, but the properties it affects in families and cultures are more visible on a day-to-day basis. In this article, Women in Today's World, we come to discover how personal our history really relays itself in front of us so commonly. Growing up, grasping gender roles was never so difficult, but being socially aware enough to point out the toxicity in some was always more of internal conflict." What I understand in that as I'm reading this, I'm seeing the student begin to grapple with these concepts, making distinctions between the personal and the familial and then out in the world. Ultimately, this assignment is to help students internalize the concepts, help students be flexible with the concepts, and also help students have fun with the concepts that are really important in this course.

Cynthia Flores: Thankfully, Pauline has completely made this clear. What is this? What is this Meme Madness? So students are learning about concepts such as multiculturalism, cultural appropriation, assimilation, acculturation, and ethnic identity. The class has been grouped into four bracket tournament regions based on four terms, acculturation, assimilation, ethnic identity, and family and gender rules. Teams for each region have been formed. Each team has researched their term, created their original explanation of it, stated how the term relates to their Lit 3 class, and created a visual representation of their term in the form of a meme, and these are the memes that are in our bracket tournament. From this bracket tournament, students are able, from Bridge and from on campus, are able to look at the different memes and make some decisions about which one speaks to them, right? So they're voting for each one.

Cynthia Flores: Interestingly, Purple Puppies, "Everyone is so mean because I'm green." Pepe the Frog is lamenting his greenness. Everyone is so mean because I'm green. This idea of ethnic identity. And even though, I think what's interesting about these memes is that when we have a sense of humor about things, or even if it's painful, right? There's something about humor that makes us know that we've taken in something kind of deeply and that we are understanding it in terms of humor, and so humor is actually quite sophisticated. You have to have a lot of flexibility to be able to make the connections and make somebody kind of chuckle and think about things.

Cynthia Flores: So that's really one of the other reasons that I have found this assignment to be special, is just the way students are able ... They had so much fun creating them, and they were joking around, and in the joking around they were able to really see the truth of what they are exploring. These concepts are not funny. These concepts are deep to our human experience, but they can be humorous and they can be telling. I just liked that the students were having that dialogue. They were trying to figure out which image, that they were thinking about their digital rhetoric, thinking about their visual rhetoric and the kinds of images that are, what is it saying? What is it communicating? Being able to read it. Why is one meme so easily comprehended? What are the dynamics here? So I think having students really understand that, it's been pretty neat.

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