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The Difference Between Monet and Manet

By Brittany Benjamin

fter four years as an art history major, I should be used to the question: "What are you going to do with that?"

It's a valid question. Art history majors are bred for primarily two occupations: curator or professor—and I can't say that I'm particularly drawn to either. I do know that I have enjoyed every single class and I thank Santa Clara's core.

In high school, we didn't have art history, and the only difference between Monet and Manet was a vowel.

When I arrived at Santa Clara with its Western Civilization requirement, all the classes I wanted were filled by the time of my registration. Spur of the moment, I registered for an art history class to fill a simple requirement. I never guessed I would fall in love with it.

I have made lasting connections with my professors, who are interested in my personal and academic success. The study of the artwork itself has provided a lens to explore cultures that I otherwise would not have studied.

A common complaint however is that many of those classes which students take just to fill a requirement are unrelated to one another; they are simply just classes to "survive" before moving on to classes pertaining specifically to particular majors.

I can honestly say that my math was something I struggled to "survive," but I was happy to be able to check those classes off my list.

During this past school year, Santa Clara completely revamped its core curriculum for the 2009 freshman class by redefining, adding and subtracting courses that are mandatory for all students. The new curriculum places a greater emphasis on providing students with a more global education — not just focusing on a Western perspective, but how the West interacts with cultures around the world. It seeks to draw attention to the issues in an increasingly connected world.

The new core program also aims to address many of the problems of its preceding program. Instead of taking seemingly unrelated classes and compiling them into a to-do list, courses connect through transcending themes that translate across academic fields.

With the program in its first year, it's difficult to tell what kind of impact it will have, but I believe it's a step in the right direction—offering a more rounded education, a value that rings true with Jesuit philosophy.

Two dark moments

It is my hope that as this new core continues to grow, it will address another issue: diversity.

In my freshman year, Santa Clara made national headlines because of a "south of the border" off-campus party where attendees dressed in Latino stereotypes.

It's a dark moment in Santa Clara's

history that I'm sure a lot of students would much rather forget. Having experienced the shame the university felt after the party, I never dreamed I would see another offensive theme party while I was at Santa Clara. I did. During my senior year, the party was hip-hop themed.

While the hosts of both parties insist that it was never their intent to offend, people were still hurt by the stereotypes portrayed.

I think the root of the problem comes from ignorance. One of the common complaints following the most recent party was that the university's curriculum does not encourage students to take classes focusing on issues of diversity. Students do not understand the experiences of underrepresented minority groups and therefore don't understand why the party was hurtful.

The new core has the power to address this ignorance. While there was a single ethnic studies requirement in the old core, clearly something was missing. With the reinvention of the core, students should be exposed to issues of diversity *repeatedly* within a classroom — in more than just one class. It should be an integral theme in the curriculum, one that is pounded hard into our minds.

On that day, theme parties will no longer have a host at Santa Clara.

Brittany Benjamin is a senior art history and communications double major at Santa Clara University.