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Issue List

February, 2012 Issue

In This Issue

**HOT
SPEAKERS
FOR 2012**

Hot Speakers for 2012

From creative topics to celebrity speakers to cultural and environmental messages, we have selected 18 of the nation's best choices for your lecture program.



Kimberly Dark

As a performer, storyteller and sociologist, Kimberly educates programmers on how to put on a show with a message.



Go Overboard

There is as much young talent in the world today as ever before. Many would say there is more, and we agree.

Herps and Snakes ALIVE!

Kimberly Dark



So hey! How about we get a group together and talk about gender oppression? No? Okay, how about pizza and a discussion of race and class disparities?

Not into that either? Right. Got it.

Folks, this is why performance-based lecture programs can be really powerful issue-focused offerings. As a sociologist, I realized a long time ago that our most exciting messages about social life mean zip if people don't want to hear it -- or they listen only because they already agree or feel forced to attend. With performance programs, the audience can momentarily forget that they're thinking about things that might usually make them uneasy. And gosh, it's clear why

people don't want to discuss big uncomfortable issues -- especially in public. There's a chance that someone could feel blamed or left out of the discussion. There's a chance that differing opinions could cause trouble and broken friendships. People get nervous that they'll be judged -- not even for something they DID, but just because of who they are and how they talk and think about things.



A first hand interactive visit with creatures of all kinds! Don't worry, you don't have to touch them?unless you want to!

9 online articles from this issue.

Next



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Performance programs - whether theatre, comedy, storytelling or spoken word - offer a way into discussion and personal transformation about issues that seem too big to tackle head-on. Indeed, social change is rarely full speed ahead - it's more like a winding path through passions, incidents, friendships and transformative moments. Good performance programs can inspire those transformative moments with very little effort from the audience -- they think they're just being entertained.

First off, performance programs are enjoyable. Personally, I'm a fan of pleasure - I think pleasure gets a bad rep as being frivolous, dumbed-down. Actually, pleasure is a sign that things are going well! And it can come from a number of sources. We can find pleasure in humor or in discovery or in catharsis or in interaction or in intellectual stimulation - sometimes all in the same evening. Moreover, pleasure actually helps us learn better - it helps events and information integrate into memory. This is part of why you do better in classes you find pleasurable AND meaningful.

Secondly, performance programs allow the audience to stop thinking about the big scary issue on the menu, and just watch the show. Really good lectures use many of the same elements -- storytelling, interaction and emotional connection. That's great - and performance-based programs add a mysterious "extra." A lecture may superficially seem to have more content, and over the years, I've seen how the content in a performance is sneaky. It's harder to define the learning objectives right after the show, and then later, a whole lot of Aha! can arrive in a gestalt flash at 3 a.m. And those insights are easy to discuss with others because everyone has a baseline experience (the show and its contents) that engaged both the mind and emotions. Post-show discussions are often livelier because you can agree AND disagree with a performance, all the while revealing subtle attitudes and beliefs that might otherwise be hard to discuss openly.

Finally, performance programs remind us that there is more to life than thinking about things. On campus, we live in the head first -- we're all about intellectual pursuit. I'm a fan of thinking and learning, of course, and if we fail to connect learning to living, then what's it all for? We need to laugh and cry and love. In performance, the audience is prompted to witness the person on stage, rather than just listening for meaning. The show is a complete experience, and its effects unfold over time.

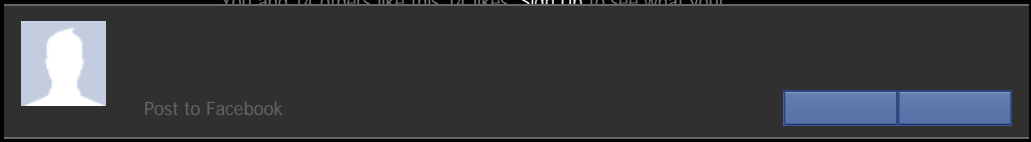
Now, if "performance program" makes you think of skit-night at camp, let me give you a reality check. Like me, most of the folks I know who are offering performance programs on college campuses have also had some success and won some awards doing performances at theaters and festivals. We get around, and not all of our audiences were forced to be there by some kooky professor who thinks performance is cool. Even though there's a "diversity message" in my performances, some people buy a ticket simply because the shows are funny and entertaining.

I bring you good news about campus programming! Performance programs can prompt ways of seeing the world that will remind you how powerful you are. Through performance, you literally see the issue unfolding on stage - embodied,

complex and beautiful. Some performers prompt audience wisdom to emerge; others offer specific strategies that can make big social problems feel "movable." Either way, it can be fun - entertaining even - getting there. We are, after all, relentless social creators. It's easy to forget, but it's true. Conscious campus programming is one way to acknowledge the social creation of culture. So, look for entertainment that's meaningful -- look for "lectures" that are entertainment. And always remember to have fun making the world a better place!

Kimberly Dark is a performer, storyteller and sociologist. Her work reveals the contours of privilege and oppression in daily life so that we can be more conscious cultural creators. The Advocate newsmagazine just named her one of six top LGBT speakers on college campuses in America. **For bookings go to kirklandproductions.com**

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