CAITLAH Urban Literacies
Institute Showcases Hip Hop

A dynamic center for teaching and learning research in the arts and humanities, the Center for Applied Inclusive Teaching and Learning in the Arts and Humanities (CAITLAH) is a College of Arts & Letters initiative that is committed to advancing effective and transformative teaching practices in Pre-K to U settings.

As the College seeks to become a leader in excellence in research and undergraduate and graduate education, CAITLAH will help shape and advise CAL departments and their faculty on advancements in teaching and learning across arts and humanities fields, and support educators in their quest toward excellence.
CAITLAH works to advance Pre-K-U Teaching Practices

CAITLAH works to accomplish this through its research on languages, literacies, mixed media texts, and cultures within and across boundaries of difference. The Center also does this in its collaborations with teachers, promising new insights into curricular design, pedagogy, and creative assessments aimed at engaging all learners. Finally, CAITLAH does this through its work with families, communities, and schools, investing quality efforts toward the advancement of language and literacy within the academy and beyond.

Recent CAITLAH events include the Urban Literacies Institute for Transformative Teaching (ULTT) and an associated Hip Hop Showcase held June 18-21, 2012, and the American Indian Youth Film Workshop, held in summer 2012 and 2013.

The ULTT Conference’s roots lie in New York City’s Annual Preemptive Education Mentor, Teacher, Educator & Community Activist Training. Central to conference goals was the provision of creative and practical resources for a more authentic, humanizing, and progressive pedagogy rooted in social justice and equity. Using the power of spoken word, poetry, and Hip Hop as the lenses to explore language and privilege, participants learned best practices from professionals in key fields of education, youth development, spoken word and Hip Hop.

CAITLAH’s ULTT Conference’s visiting artists and educators included:

**JAMILA LYISCOTT** (left) describes herself as an academic activist, spoken word artist, and educator and is currently a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University where her work focuses on the education of the African Diaspora. She also serves as the program associate at Urban Word NYC, a community based after school organization that works to champion youth literacy, development, and voice through Hip Hop, spoken word, literature, and social justice pedagogy. Jamila works as a mentor, educator, and workshop facilitator in spaces throughout New York City’s five boroughs where her practice seeks to encourage student-centered learning and validate the voices of marginalized youth. All facets of Jamila’s endeavors are rooted in her Christian values, which are at the center of her work and purpose.

**Dawn-Elissa Fischer**, who presented “Methods to Floss and Theories to Flow: Teaching Social Justice and Critical Thinking through HipHop.” Engaging educators in an examination of identity in its relationship to popular culture, policy and pedagogy, this workshop introduced key concepts concerning Hip Hop aesthetics, activism and research as tools for inspiring humanistic principles with the youth being taught.

Fischer is a professor in the Department of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University.

**Toni Blackman**, who presented “Freestyle on Poetic Possibilities: Improv and Spoken Word,” where she demonstrated how to use improvisation and the spoken word to heighten creativity, inspire self-expression, build vocabulary, increase student confidence and build community within a group.

Blackman’s work is both domestic and global in nature. As America’s first Hip Hop Ambassador, Blackman and her work have consistently communicated that Hip Hop is the international platform to position the U.S. as a good global citizen. Toni has done extensive work internationally and has shared the stage with many renowned artists.

**Adam Falkner**, who presented “In Need of Some Serious DAP: Changing the Conversation about Diversity in Education through Creative Writing, Performance and Intergroup Dialogue.” This workshop—an introduction to the presenter’s larger “Dialogue Arts Project” curriculum—used creative writing and the arts to promote the exploration of social identity among and between students, artists and educators for the purpose of better understanding how their voices contribute to and fit within the changing educational communities in which they work.

Falkner is a poet, performer, English teacher and the founder and executive director of the Dialogue Arts Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to incorporating creative writing, the performing arts, and intergroup dialogue into teaching and training processes.

**Mikal Amin Lee, aka Hired Gun**, who presented “The Community of Self,” a workshop where participants discussed the revolutionary educator Paulo Friere, his philosophy and how his principles of participatory learning can produce a community of eager and engaged learners. This workshop was designed as a journey in democratizing the classroom, and looking at the practice of learning from the inside out, through dialogue, and critical analysis of what really matters to the student. Lee also presented a workshop on “The Art of Rhyme,” that sought to demystify the skill known to Hip Hop aficionados as “freestyling,” which refers to the act of rapping in a freewheeling, improvised
fashion without the use of a pre-written-and-memorized “rhyme,” or verse.

Lee has been an arts educator for the past six years, and Hip Hop artist, performer and cultural critic for over 12 years. A staple of New York City’s independent Hip Hop community since 2000, he has conducted workshops and spoken at Yale University, Marist College, Georgetown, Connecticut College, and the U.S. Institute of Peace, and headlined International Hip Hop festivals in Europe and Africa.

M.C. K-Swift, who presented a youth workshop “Hip Hop Contains Pedagogy,” that facilitated a discussion of how the “Hip Hop Cultural Arts Canon” has revolutionized teaching and learning. Educators figured out new ways to truly engage with Hip Hop culture and the students who are galvanized by it. He followed this up with a youth workshop “RAP = Rhythm And Poetry,” where participants explored their own histories and creativity through dynamic writing and performance exercises. The workshop provided a space for young people to freely express themselves, while learning to be active and positive contributors to their community.

A Hip Hop artist and educator, M.C. K-Swift has been recording and performing since 1994. In 2011, he became the co-director of the “One Mic” program. He has taped for HBO’s “Def Poetry Jam” and appears on HBO’s “Brave New Voices.” A founding member of the progressive Hip Hop collective, New Rap Order and a member of the Universal Zulu Nation.

Eagle Nebula, who presented “Knowledge of Self: Put Your Truth on the Page,” and “The way I rhyme,” a youth workshop. The first workshop explored methods to engage and encourage students to honor the magic of their experiences using elements of poetry and rap lyricism. Through active engagement, participants learned tips and techniques to assist students with identifying their stories, getting ideas down on paper, and using poetic devices to make their work shine. The second workshop introduced youth to the art of creative lyricism, as participants let their imaginations run wild and learned how to make a whole new world using their words. Eagle Nebula is an emcee, poet and filmmaker from Inglewood, California. In 2008, she released her debut album “Cosmic Headphones” and was awarded the June Jordan poetry fellowship for the Pan African Literary Forum in Ghana, West Africa, where she studied under Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa. She has taught and performed throughout the United States and Ghana and has shared the stage with many Hip Hop greats and legends. For more information visit www.iam eaglenebula.com

INTIKANA, (above photos) who presented “Hip Hop: Its Native Roots and Indigenous Culture.” Through critical thinking exercises, interactive discussion, and multi-media presentation, workshop participants reviewed Hip Hop’s ancestral line and examined the socio-political circumstances that set the stage for Hip Hop to be created. Through analyzing the exploitation of immigrants and the colonization of indigenous peoples, they explored ways to become stronger visionary agents of change, through Hip Hop, in our communities.

INTIKANA is a national award-winning Hip Hop artist, educator, and activist from the Bronx. He has been featured on VH1 and toured across the United States and internationally while sharing the stage with artists such as KRS-One, Immortal Technique, Talib Kweli, Lupe Fiasco, M1, and Saul Williams, among others. For more info, visit: www.intikana.net.

Invincible, who presented “Emergence Travel Agency: Resisting displacement, gentrification and colonization through hip-hop and media for the youth.” Participants in this workshop explored contemporary social issues and discussed concerns of resisting displacement, gentrification and colonization through Hip Hop and media, utilizing a group dialogue to compose different narratives of these experiences.

Truly a rare find in an artist, Invincible has a spitfire wordplay that has garnered her acclaim from Hip Hop fans all across the world, while her active involvement in progressive social change has taken her music beyond entertainment, and toward actualizing the change she wishes to see. The Detroit-based Hip Hop artist and activist began penning lyrics at the age of nine, shortly after learning English by memorizing her favorite songs. For the last decade she has worked with Detroit Summer, a multi-racial, inter-generational collective in Detroit. Invincible is also the co-coordinator of the Detroit Future Youth network to support social justice and media-based youth projects throughout Detroit.