La Costa Maya

As the principal investigator, I used the Scholarly Activity Improvement Fund Award productively in conjunction with a sabbatical period of one semester release time from my teaching duties at UW-Platteville during the fall of 2010.

**Proposed Project**

I would use the sabbatical period for the purpose of observing and documenting a very distinct and rapidly disappearing environment in order to create a group of drawing works on paper that represented what I experienced. This project would result in a unique visual exploration of life in the pristine southern Yucatan Caribbean coast, called the Costa Maya. I would live in the Yucatan for an extended period and make as many artworks as possible, specifically with pastel or watercolor media from subject matter in this region. The SAIF award would fund the cost of the necessary matting and framing to prepare the works for display in an exhibition at the UWP campus. The funding would also allow me to begin the process of compiling, editing and photographing the works in order to reproduce the eventual project in publication form.

**Goals**

• By observing the people and the environment of the Yucatan Caribbean coast for a lengthy period of time, I would utilize what I would encounter in this unique part of the world and translate the imagery into a visual form that would convey a specific message about the diversity, beauty and fragility of this area.

• The project would enhance my personal knowledge of the relationships of color, composition and design, and further my familiarity with specific art media so that I may pass that information on to my students in my classes at UWP.
• The resulting project would provide the proper number of individual works of art in order to display the images in an exhibition at the UWP campus.

• The artwork from the project would be unique and visually compelling and assembled as a documentary group in order to create an eventual book that would present the images to a larger audience.

**Results**

Although I faced many unexpected challenges that included experiencing three tropical storms and two hurricanes, losing much of my paper due to humidity and rust, and maintaining household utilities with inadequate power in such a remote location, I managed to produce many drawings and photographs. The imagery became preliminary sketch and reference material I used as the basis for further work. From the preliminary work, I created larger, more complex works in pastel media. I came away from the experience learning much more about the materials and working methods I was accustom to using. I discovered that my choice of materials for the project was not the best for documenting life in the Costa Maya region of the Yucatan. Oil painting media would have been a better choice due to the extreme humidity, heat, and salt air in this part of the world. Because of its overall flexibility of use and durability, oil media would have allowed me to create more finalized art pieces in a shorter amount of time. Although I did struggle in my endeavors with the project, I developed a successful working method that allowed me to create a number of large-scale pastel works.

The funds awarded for the project were used to purchase framing and matting materials and to cover some of the required photography expenses associated with documenting the completed pastel works. Upon my return to teaching duties at UWP, I scheduled the Harry and Laura Nohr Gallery for the first available opening to exhibit the works in a show so the pastel images may be displayed for the campus community. I have already exhibited some of the framed and matted works in the Art Faculty exhibition in February of 2011. At this time, I consider the work I produced as the first phase of two in order to have a sizable number of larger, more complex pastel works on paper for eventual reproduction in a book, which documents my vision of what I observed and experienced in the Costa Maya region of the Yucatan Caribbean coast.