Report on results of Scholarly Activity Improvement Fund Grant 2012-2013

I applied for a SAIF grant in February 2012 to complete a project entitled “Trauma, Forgetting, and Reconciliation in Walt Whitman’s Civil War Writing.” My plan was to revise a conference-length essay on the issues of trauma and reconciliation in Whitman’s Civil War poetry and journals into a full length article for submission to a peer reviewed journal. Through a comparison of Walt Whitman’s Drum-Taps, his poetry collection on the Civil War, and the sections of his prose journal Specimen Days that describe his work as a nurse in Civil War hospitals, I argue that Whitman creates a vision of national reconciliation that offers solace for both killing and dying to soldiers on both sides of the conflict. In these two texts, reconciliation depends first on a kind of poetic forgetting: in Specimen Days, he writes, “the real war will never get in the books…a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp, I say, will never be written—perhaps must not and should not be.” In Drum-Taps, violent acts of killing are omitted, and are replaced by the end of the book with physical acts of love between men – acts ranging from medical assistance to sexual bonds – as the key factor in the spiritual and political future of the nation after the war. My analysis contributes to a renewed interest in Whitman’s depictions of war trauma among literary scholars, as well as critical work on the history of changing notions of sexuality in Literary and Gay and Lesbian Studies.

During the period of the grant, I was able to revise the essay into an article length piece. The essay began as an 8 page conference paper, and over the summer of 2012 I was able to expand my argument and to do an extensive review of other Whitman scholars so that I could put my work into conversation with the most recent work on his Civil War writing. The essay is now
25 pages in length. I am happy to report that I also worked in collaboration with the co-chair of the conference panel where I first presented the project to put together a proposal for a special issue of an academic journal. Our theme is “The Psyche Before Psychoanalysis,” and it will include my Whitman essay along with other essays we solicited to round out the collection. We are submitting the collection to the academic journal *Arizona Quarterly* in December of 2013. Editors at the journal have expressed great interest in the project and we hope to have final approval by Spring of 2014.