2006 Eugene M. Lang Summer Initiative Grant in the Humanities Report

To: Provost’s Office, Prof. A

This summer I received a grant to study Shakespearean performance from my perspective as an actor, a director, and a theatre scholar. I participated in the Summer Training Institute run by the members of Shakespeare & Company at their site in Lenox, Massachusetts, and supplemented this intensive workshop with historical and dramaturgical research of my own in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas.

Shakespeare & Company, under the artistic direction of Tina Packer, has been training theatre students and professionals for nearly three decades. Their approach is highly personal and emotionally charged, combining a great respect for Shakespeare’s words, vision, and the Elizabethan worldview with a sincere regard for the individual actor as a creative artist in his or her own right. Tina Packer, Kristin Linklater, and many other notable theatre artists developed the technique in order to explore the power of the spoken word, the expressivity of the physical body, and timeless and timely human dilemmas.

For five weeks I joined a group of thirty college-age actors from diverse personal and educational backgrounds. Under the direction of master teachers, we trained for ten hours a day, six days a week, and much of our rare free time was spent attending performances, studying Shakespeare’s plays and our own lines, and debating questions of technique, history, rhetoric, poetry, and stagecraft. Every day we attended classes in Linklater voice and Alexander movement, rehearsed scenes, monologues, and sonnets, and cycled through courses on textual analysis, clowning, stage fighting, Elizabethan dance, commedia dell’arte, and historical dramaturgy. I became Lady Percy of the Henry IV plays, Cleopatra at the end of her life, and Olivia falling deeply in love with Viola, disguised as Cesario. I learned to control the movement of my soft palette, dance the Pavane, and apply my own emotional and intellectual life to the life of the character. We examined the differences between the Quartos and the First Folio, the ideological and artistic motivations behind the editor’s choices in modern versions of the plays, and the tangled line of succession resulting in the Wars of the Roses. Although our five weeks culminated in a showcase performance, it was the process that imprinted itself in my memory and within my body.

My work at Shakespeare and Company has inspired me as a director and honed my craft as an actor. I look forward to working further with the company in some capacity in their Education department. This year, however, I will find a direct application of the demanding, amazing training I experienced. I am currently a senior double-majoring in Theatre Studies and Sociology/Anthropology. Two of my thesis will be performances, an acting thesis and a directing thesis. I will work with Professors Alix Kates Shulman and Elizabeth Stevens to select an appropriate and challenging Shakespeare play through
which to further develop my skills and passions. This play will be performed in the spring, along with one from outside the Shakespearean canon.

I would like to thank the committee and the donor for this exceptional opportunity. It is truly a privilege to study theatre at an institution that regards it as an art and a discipline as well as a practice deserving of rigorous scholarship.

Sincerely,