OVERALL AIM:

The overall aim of Phase I of the heARTS Series, an acronym for Disability as Higher Education through the ARTS is to launch a critical public dialog about disability equity and social justice issues through a ‘speakers’ series that will be led by artists and policy spokespersons from the cross-disability communities. Artists and speakers with disabilities will draw upon a variety of different media (visual and performing) and disability-related policy to publicly share their own authentic narratives in their own voices with the non-disabled public at UBC students, faculty and staff. Inspired by innovative cultural and arts-based engagement, the series will challenge the dominant tropes and stereotypes that persons with disabilities are leading lives of pity, charity, heroic inspiration, or more often, dire tragedy. The series will educate the non-disabled, as well as provide active mentorship to aspiring talented artists and speakers with disabilities who will be performing alongside or conjunction with renowned artists and speakers with disabilities. Talented artists and young scholars with disabilities drawn from the existing and prospective student body at UBC will be paired with one high-profile and well-known professional artist with a disability to give paired performances/talks, artistic or film screenings to a large receive Grounded in the larger international, national and local disability arts, cultural and right’s-based movement, the heARTS series will instigate a long overdue dialog UBC that brings together artists, performers and speakers with disabilities in an approach that harmonizes artistic and cultural politics with a rights’-based and policy approaches to social justice on disability issues. The series is part of the three-year plan to establish a Visiting Artist-with-a-Disability-Residency program in the professional faculties of UBC (Education, Law, Medicine, Nursing and Social Work) of which the series is to be an integrated part. The goal is to increase the retention of undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities through the provision of role models from the disability arts and culture movement in and outside of higher education, particularly in the professional faculties.

OUTCOMES:

The speakers and the work to produce this series have far exceeded the audience, reach and impact of the course by bringing in other audiences, widening student, staff and faculty exposure to high-profile artists with disabilities for which students would not have otherwise had the in-person exposure. For example, several of the talks have been publicly advertised and open to the public, as well as to the many Faculties and community-and disability-rights’ list-serves. Moreover, what was once an occlusion, disability as a social justice and equity issue as part of the Faculty of Education’s 50th Anniversary Celebrations, is now being taken seriously. So, clearly the efforts to get this series recognized have begun to leave their mark beyond one course offering. Moreover, the series has
brought on board interest from other co-sponsors, CCIE and the David Lam Chair, as well as others. The School Leadership Centre has invited me to guest edit an issue on inclusion featuring the work of students at UBC with disabilities interested in writing about disability rights and critical disability studies.

OUTCOMES:

Among the timely and relevant outcomes in these two semesters and all three phases will be to produce curricular materials designed by students with disabilities, including the work of video-streaming the performances of those artists who give permission for their performances to be used on a broader basis. This will several goals directly relevant to Equity Enhancement Fund: 1) Expand employment opportunities for students with disabilities who are underemployed; 2) outreach to disability communities not on campus; 3) the beginning of an archive, including video resources from the series available for use in the University and by the larger public promoting disability equity and social justice awareness. Finally, students have been offered the opportunity to participate in developing an on-line special issue of *Educational Insights* to reflect on the heARTS series and their work to build the series shows ongoing interest in the area.

The disability graduate seminar from whence the heARTS series has evolved has benefited from the larger exposure to the audiences at these different events. The seminar has 14 students. The audience size for the publicly high-profile speakers/or performers has thus far ranged from 15-to 250 (the latter expected for David Roche). The instructor has taken her cues too from speakers or self-advocates who did not wish to have large audiences which was the case on one occasion thus far and which the seminar participants were the audience. Otherwise, to date, the speakers’ series has brought 8 speakers in Term one and will bring four more in Term Two so as to maximize audience and concentrate the resources for advertising, venues and honoraria. The funding requested is to be used for honoraria only over the two semesters. While the course has been funded by the Dept., the series has not. The series has relied on the time and knowledge of the speakers’ who represent a seriously economically disadvantaged community and whose labour, time and skills need to be paid. Since UBC is woefully out of step in the hiring, recruitment and retention of graduate students, faculty and staff with disabilities and does not offer a disability program at either the undergraduate or graduate level, requesting funds to seed this series as part of a larger equity three year project is entirely within the scope of the Equity Enhancement fund.

While he course in both semesters has been or will be funded by the Department on a special topics basis, the series has not been funded in monetary terms except through in-kind labour. However, it has gone exceptionally well with students excited by their exposure to the range of speakers and artists with disabilities. The only self-reflexive criticism I would indicate is that it takes a village to raise a dream and fill a large equity gap in the disability-related area and so obviously one course and speakers’ series cannot do full justice to the very real gaps in educational, employment, recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty with disabilities, as well as in the education for social
justice around disability-related equity. This series is one important way to bring attention to these gaps with the aim that it seeds and fuels greater work and dreams in this area.

**EVALUATION:**

A feedback sheet will be given at the David Roche performance on the March 29th to the audience regarding their input on this event and other disability-events in this series. Speakers/artists in the series will be asked to complete an open-ended set of questions regarding the impact of the series on their professional careers in terms of being mentored or serving as a mentor for other artists or aspiring scholars whose focus is on disability arts, culture and rights. It should also be noted that beyond any quantitative or qualitative measure, educating staff, students, faculty and the broader public is one of the successful aims of this series that cannot be easily measured except in terms of the contribution to the equitable employment. In terms of redressing some of the employment gaps, the series aims to further involve and employ students in the second term and phase with matching funding being sought by Dr. Roman (elsewhere) in year two or second semester to hire two graduate student RA’s with disabilities to coordinate the series on an employed basis and they will design an evaluation schema for future events next year.