

Animating the Creative Campus – Education and Engagement for the 21st Century

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Click on the links embedded in the text throughout to access background research and project examples.

Every leader in higher education wants to walk out in front of parents, students, alumni, and members of the broader community and say, “[Look what can happen at a place like this....](#)” Arts-driven collaborations on campus offer inspiring examples of such high-impact, mind-expanding undertakings. Presidents, provosts and deans should initiate conversations on their campuses about deploying artistic assets to advance institutional missions – specifically to deepen learning, spur innovation, build community and commitment, and demonstrate the unique value of a 21st century education organized around face-to-face collaborative discovery. The time has come to [take the lessons from the Association of Performing Arts Presenter’s \(APAP\) Creative Campus Innovations Grant experiment](#) and apply them broadly to higher education.

Ten years ago, university leaders gathered at Arden House for the [104th American Assembly](#) meeting to discuss the connection between higher education and the arts. Since that meeting, sustained conversation, experimentation and research have demonstrated the significant contributions the arts make to campus life and learning. Funders including the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Teagle Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Ford Foundation have supported national research, conferences, and programmatic experiments. Last year, a consortium of 23 research universities pledged \$80,000 to establish a [formal national network](#) to support the integration of artists and arts practice throughout American research universities. And individual campuses, such as Harvard, Emory, Brown, Stanford, Vanderbilt, University of Minnesota and Davidson, have created taskforces to elevate and integrate the arts and creativity across campus. Ongoing research demonstrates that arts-based inquiry [deepens learning and student engagement](#). Moreover, the accumulated evidence reveals [that the arts on campus can drive innovation](#), create an environment that supports risk taking, and [help prepare students for a workforce that demands creative skills](#) (Book and Philips 2013, Edwards 2008, Friedman 2006; Root-Bernstein 2008 & 2009, Sawyer 2011, Tepper and Kuh 2011).

In this short paper, we extend these arguments to focus specifically on the **value of integrating the arts across campus** through richly layered, interdisciplinary, collaborative explorations. Drawing on the experiences of three institutions that received Creative Campus Innovations Grants, we argue that the arts are an underutilized resource that can be deployed to foster a more collaborative and inter-connected campus. These **arts-based, interdisciplinary exchanges** produce deeper learning, energize faculty and students and develop a **distinctive local brand and identity for campuses** seeking to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. Importantly, deploying artistic resources more strategically across the university provides campus leaders with an effective tool to achieve powerful and visible results with relatively little new investment.

Higher Education and Intangible Assets

In today's hyper competitive environment, higher education leaders seek to foster performance-driven cultures, adopting the latest principles and **practices of a managerial economy** (Tuchman 2009). Universities have embraced proven management practices based on centralization, efficiency, cost controls, revenue diversification, outsourcing, enrollment management, marketing and branding, and specialization. Many major research universities have the added challenges of managing academic medical centers and hospitals during a time of dramatic change in health care. In such an environment, the benefits of art-based inquiry and collaboration may fail to show up in the everyday balance sheet of an institution. These benefits are what economists call "**intangible assets**," and include such factors as an organization's reputation, its ability to innovate, employee loyalty and pride, and high-quality relationships both within and outside of the institution (Thomas 2011).

New research suggests that universities, as with corporations, must also pay more attention to their "intangible assets." For example, according to researchers at Northwestern University, a university's intangible assets – what they refer to as "**educational good will**"—ultimately make a difference in yield rate for admitted students when competing with other equally ranked institutions (Nurnberg et al. 2011). This finding echoes what urban scholars have found in assessing the "**competitiveness of cities**" –a city's creativity, buzz, and sense of inclusion are critical for attracting the talent necessary for economic growth. While we can only speculate about what creates this "good will" on college campuses, we know the arts are a critical part of the equation.

In particular, the innovations grant model funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (described below) shows the unique role the arts can play in fostering a culture for creative, interdisciplinary collaborations. Such collaboration, according to Brandeis University business professor **Robert Thomas**, is perhaps the most important intangible or invisible asset of a business or institution. It is worth quoting him at length:

“The most important invisible ability is the ability to collaborate. After all, it’s the willingness on the part of people to work together to solve problems when they could just as easily pass them along to someone else that forms the core of most things we call collaboration. It’s decisions that someone makes to share an idea or to spend the extra hour helping out – not the regulation or contract that requires it – that usually means the difference between “good enough” and “outstanding.”

“So the question is: What are the most critical intangible assets in your company? What are you doing to cultivate them? Who is responsible for managing the invisible that creates the intangibles?” (Thomas 2011)

For universities to thrive, faculty must do more than simply publish in their disciplines or show up to teach their allotted number of courses; students must go beyond getting good grades and accumulating credits towards graduation; and alumni must be compelled to give back and to serve. Members of the university community are asked to **make the university bigger than the sum of its parts**. They are asked to be part not only of a “transactional university” that exchanges goods and services; but also a “transformative university” that changes lives. Collaborations made possible through the arts can produce these critical intangible assets that turn a campus, in Thomas’ words, from “good enough” to “outstanding.”

Innovations Grant Program and Models of Collaboration

The value of arts-based interdisciplinary exchange was explored through the **Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program**. APAP, with a grant of \$3.5 million from the Doris Duke Charitable Trusts, created the Innovations Grants to seed inventive, interdisciplinary programs that brought together artists with a range of community and campus-based partners in order to stimulate arts-based inquiry and elevate the role of the arts in academic life. Over a six-year period, 14 campus-based performing arts presenters received grants, all of which involved one or more artist-in-residence.

Outcomes from these grants demonstrate that arts-based interdisciplinary explorations generate critical intangible assets, including an environment for collaboration, deep student engagement, and what former **Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor** describes as “an ecology for innovation.” Importantly, the grant program demonstrated that those who are responsible for presenting performing and visual arts to their campuses are willing and able to take responsibility for managing these essential and vital creative collaborations. These arts leaders wake up everyday with the explicit mandate to work across disciplines and to engage the community in creative and non-routine collaboration. There are few other positions on campus with this mandate, and with support, encouragement and vision from university presidents, provosts and deans, these leaders can extend, amplify and integrate

their work in ways that, as former Chancellor Holden Thorp from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill remarked in a recent interview, “create something that is bigger than the sum of its parts.”

Several national reports have documented and evaluated the 14 Creative Campus programs. Below we highlight three projects that showcase different models for effective collaboration.

1. High impact centrality

One powerful form of collaboration involves what might be termed the “hub and spokes” approach, where arts-based programming is focused on a common theme and coordinated by a central entity with activities unfolding across campus with diverse partners. The Carpenter Center for Performing Arts at [California State University Long Beach](#) used this model when bringing musicians, performance artists, journalists, choreographers, authors, critics, filmmakers, and attorneys to campus to engage students and the community in debates about works of art and expression that have been banned, blacklisted or boycotted. The B-Word Project embedded artistic presentations from dance, theater, music, film, murals in history, philosophy, human development and English classes; it involved the Center for First Amendment Studies and the University Art Museum as well as multiple student groups on campus; and it took place in improvised public spaces. By the end of the initiative, virtually every member of the university community knew about the B-Word Project. The thousands who participated reported high levels of engagement and learning, and the interdisciplinary steering committee for the project became a permanent committee with the mandate of matching faculty and departments with touring artists scheduled to appear each year as part of the performing arts season. The B-Word Project is an example of a “high impact” collaboration. With relatively modest additional resources, the university organized a season of guest artists and lectures and connected them with dozens of departments and organizations to create a powerful, 18-month happening around an important contemporary issue.

2. The caduceus rod

A second model involves intense interdisciplinary collaboration around a common objective or theme. Like the Caduceus rod that features two serpents wrapped around a single staff, [Wesleyan University](#) paired scientists with artists in intense curricular and co-curricular activities designed to address scientific, social, and

aesthetic issues surrounding climate change. Addressing global warming, a choreographer was paired with an earth scientist to produce a common freshman experience for incoming Wesleyan students that included readings, discussions, and a culminating public performance involving 500 first-year students in a participatory dance work on Foss Hill, a campus landmark. Artists and scientists also teamed up to design course modules to explore important scientific and social questions relating to climate change. A professor of economics and environmental studies collaborated with a choreographer to explore alternative ways of communicating the risks of climate change through photographs and movement. An anthropologist and a printmaker worked together on a module that involved documenting the lives of people who live near a local landfill site, and a theater director worked with a physics professor to help students examine how performance techniques could help them become better advocates for energy policies. In five years, 14 such course modules were offered. Pam Tatge, Director of Wesleyan's Center for the Arts, remarked on the power of the collaborative pairings: "We not only taught scientific data, we gave students a heightened and embodied awareness of that science that led to deeper engagement and knowledge."

3. Skunk works

A third model involves creating a cross-functional, interdisciplinary group within an organization characterized by a high degree of autonomy, unhampered by bureaucracy, and tasked with working together to create a new or innovative product. Lockheed Martin's Advanced Development Program pioneered such a of collaboration model – referred to as "skunk works" –that is widely used in business, engineering, and technical fields. **Montclair used this model to develop an innovative campus-wide course on creativity.** Leadership at Montclair pulled together an interdisciplinary team and provided them with space, time (24 months), and the mandate to work with artists to design and pilot a new, team-taught course. The "skunk works" team included a physicist, a mathematician, a philosopher, a marketing professor as well as faculty from theater/dance and music education. Collaborating with three visiting artists (a choreographer, a performance artist, and a theater producer) over the course of the two-year project grant, the faculty working group developed a curriculum aimed at helping students interrogate and deploy various aspects of the creative process and strengthen and engage their "creative muscle." The faculty team piloted the course during Summer 2012, made revisions

and offered a full-semester version in Spring 2013, with plans to eventually make the material from the “creative thinking” course available to all students at Montclair.

The Power of the Arts to Foster Interdisciplinary, Deep Collaboration and Engagement

The arts are particularly effective partners when it comes to deep collaboration because they create what scholars call “trading zones” – spaces where people can exchange ideas and learn from one another without the same external pressures tied to extrinsic rewards and strict disciplinary practices. The arts contribute to these trading zones in unique ways. They build “play” and improvisation into the creative process, embrace ambiguity and uncertainty, they use story and metaphor to produce mutual understanding and bridge cultural differences. Moreover, artists are often project-driven rather than discipline-driven and process-oriented rather than product-oriented (Brown and Tepper, 2013).

Evidence from the learning sciences indicates that arts-based inquiry and collaboration can foster deep, reflective learning and engagement. For example, the arts promote “affective learning” by stirring passions and evoking emotional responses from students; they foster “epistemic curiosity” by helping students work through puzzles where the final solution is unknown; they embrace “doing” and help students learn through active participation and experience; and they provide a platform for students to engage in difficult conversations around political and moral issues (Brown and Tepper, 2013). A recent Mellon Foundation-funded study of student engagement through the arts demonstrates that when engagement is participatory, socially relevant, paired with academic learning, process driven and occurs in collaborative and creative spaces, it can lead to deep engagement, increased academic learning, and higher levels of student satisfaction (Floberg and Brown, 2013).

Holden Thorp, whose campus received one of the Creative Campus Innovations Grants, remarked in a recent interview that “arts integrated collaborative programs that are multi-layered and ‘fire on all cylinders,’ allow our community to be part of something bigger than our individual disciplines, jobs, and classes.” In fact, several college presidents interviewed for this essay discussed the idea that the arts can be catalysts for changing the campus culture. “The creative campus raises the energy level of a campus,” says Nancy Cantor. “It leads to risk-taking and innovative thinking. But it also creates engaged learning around multiple modalities.” Cantor also notes the “opt-out” and “opt-in” culture on campus and the challenge of getting students and faculty to leave their silos and join in the social web of the campus. In her opinion, “Arts integration helps work against isolation and the hyper-individualistic and competitive world that leaves us stressed,” she says. “Instead, arts-infused programs and explorations can create imaginative spaces where people ‘opt in.’”

Importantly, all three of the Creative Campus projects produced what sociologist George Ritzer calls “[enchancing the everyday life of the campus](#).” Such enchantment is achieved by engaging faculty, students and staff in non-routine, unpredictable, and often inefficient creative explorations. These are exactly the types of collaborations that Robert Thomas argues are critical intangibles that benefit an organization’s bottom line. They create that sense of distinctiveness; the innovative milieu that attracts the best and brightest and encourages them to go beyond narrow requirements as faculty and students and to give their time and energies to make their universities, in Thorp’s words, “[larger than the sum of their parts](#).” These projects produce what some call the “ecstatic possibilities of the local,” – the sense that “[only at a place like this](#)” could such extraordinary and creative collaborations take place.

Call to Action

University leaders should initiate conversations on their campuses to examine whether artistic resources can be better deployed. [Harvard](#), Princeton, Vanderbilt, Mt. Holyoke, Davidson, the [University of Michigan](#), [Texas A&M](#), and the University of Minnesota are [examples of schools that have created just such task forces](#) and committees in recent years. This is not the first time campuses have rediscovered the power of an asset that has, perhaps, been under-valued in the past. In fact, over the past 30 years, higher education leaders have converted two other critical assets into key drivers of the 21st century creative campus.

The first key driver is the dramatic growth of technology transfer offices. In contrast to earlier times, [universities now routinely optimize the value of their intellectual property](#), leading to research partnerships and investments that benefit faculty, spur innovation, and raise money for the central coffers of the university (Sampat and Nelson 1999).

Our second example involves academic libraries. With the rise of online resources in the past few decades, many academic research libraries became less visible in the daily lives of faculty and students. Across the country, campus-wide taskforces have been charged with [reinventing the library](#) and making it a vital resource for advancing institutional goals. Today, libraries have become spaces for collaboration, laboratories for research, frontiers for digital scholarship in the humanities, and partners in developing curricula. Libraries have developed new mobile apps, video walls, project-oriented workspaces and media labs (Mathews 2011).

Both of these examples serve as useful models as leaders in higher education consider the value of the arts on campus and how they might be re-imagined as key assets for collaboration, innovation, engagement and learning.

At the 2004 American Assembly meeting, participants agreed that universities and colleges are likely the single greatest patrons of the arts in the United States. The total annual budgets and capital assets combined of university-based performing arts centers, museums, and art departments – including faculty salaries, commissions, artists-in-residence, public art, and student scholarships – likely surpasses \$5 billion. In a time of scarce resources, universities must optimize that collective investment to advance the mission of their institutions or risk losing out to those who do. **John Vaughn**, executive vice president at the Association of American Universities, predicts that universities will follow the example of American cities when it comes to recognizing the arts as a key asset. “Ten years ago, mayors across the country viewed arts institutions and artists as amenities and symbols of achievement and status,” he says. “Today, mayors see the arts as essential for economic development, strengthening schools, improving quality of life, addressing issues of sustainability and attracting and retaining talented creative class workers.”

As with city leaders, university leaders today must create interdisciplinary teams to investigate how the arts can be better leveraged and integrated on campus. Such taskforces and committees should take up four challenges:

1. **Mapping their cultural assets** in order to understand all sources of investment in the arts on campus and to locate all supplies of creative talent.
2. Looking beyond the arts and identifying curricular opportunities, academic centers and programs, curious faculty, and co-curricular opportunities that would benefit from **closer collaboration with artists and existing cultural assets**.
3. Creating a “pilot” creative campus year where they seek out non-routine ways of connecting and integrating the arts across campus.
4. Evaluating and assessing these pilots and determining a sustainable model going forward.

Conclusion

Ambitious, arts-integrated, collaborative projects – such as the APAP Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program – demonstrated the power of university effectiveness in bringing together scholars, students and artists together in face-to-face creative teams. The time has come to take the lessons from this experiment and apply them broadly across higher education. In an era when universities are asked to do more with less, they cannot afford to leave any resource, especially the arts, untapped. Any leader who fails to deploy these precious assets to their fullest will be at a disadvantage in the tempest of higher education reform and reinvention. Ten years from now, the creative campus will not just be a fashionable alliteration. Rather, arts-integration across the campus will be routine,

sustainable, and powerful, producing innumerable tangible and intangible benefits.

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