In 2007, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters embarked on a journey, with the support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, to explore the potential of the “creative campus” concept to deepen learning and interdisciplinary collaboration through the arts. The following report is meant to serve as a case statement of what we have learned from innovative projects at 14 campuses across the U.S. We especially hope this document and the digital resources that can be found at APAP365.org will be an incentive for APAP members and their colleagues to initiate dialogues with presidents and other campus and community leaders—to imagine how together they can leverage existing and potential arts assets to enhance reflective learning and engagement that should be the heart of 21st century education.

—Scott Stover, APAP Director of Programs and Resources

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 instigate 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 Presenters Creative Campus Innovations Grant experiment and apply them broadly to higher education.

Ten years ago, university leaders gathered at Arden House for the 10th Assembly 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 24 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 have created task forces 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.

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 underused resource that can foster a more collaborative and interconnected campus. These arts-based, interdisciplinary exchanges produce deeper learning, energy, 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 a hyper-competitive environment, higher education leaders seek to foster performance-driven cultures, adopting the latest principles and practices of a managerial economy. 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 healthcare. In such an environment, the benefits of arts-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 and ability to innovate, employer loyalty and pride, and high-quality relationships both within and outside of the institution.

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. This finding echoes what urban scholars have found in assessing the “completeness 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
Members of the university community are asked to be part of both a “trans- transactional” university that exchanges goods and services and a “transformative university” that changes lives.

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

HIGH-IMPACT CENTRALITY

One powerful form of collaboration involves what might be termed the “hub and spokes” approach, in which arts-based programming focuses on a common theme coordinated by a central entity with activities unfolding across campus with diverse partners. The California 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 diverse partners . The Carpenter Center for Performing Arts at Harvard 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.

FOSTERING INTERDISCIPLINARY 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 their creative processes; embrace ambiguity and uncertainty, 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.

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 encourage “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. 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.

Holden Thorp, whose campus received one of the Creative Campus Innovations Grants, explains 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 change. “The campus community 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. “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 Creative Campus Projects produced what sociologist George Ritzer calls “enchanting 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 a 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 in 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 how 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 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. As with city leaders, university leaders 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. Universities must:

- Map cultural assets to understand all sources of investment in the arts on campus and to locate all supplies of creative talent.
- Look beyond the arts and identify curricular opportunities, academic centers and programs, curious faculty and co-curricular opportunities that would benefit from closer collaboration with artists and existing cultural assets.
- Create a “pilot” creative campus year in which they seek out non-routine ways of connecting and integrating the arts across campus.
- Evaluate and assess these pilots and determine a sustainable model going forward.

CONCLUSION

Ambitious, arts-integrated, collaborative projects — such as the APAP Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program — demonstrate the power of university effectiveness in bringing together scholars, students and artists 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 al-literation. Rather, arts integration across the campus will be routine, sustainable and powerful, producing innumerable tangible and intangible benefits. [3]

REFERENCES:


Flohberg and Brown, 2013 (need full cite).


