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Inciting Insight: Situating the Arts in Higher Education

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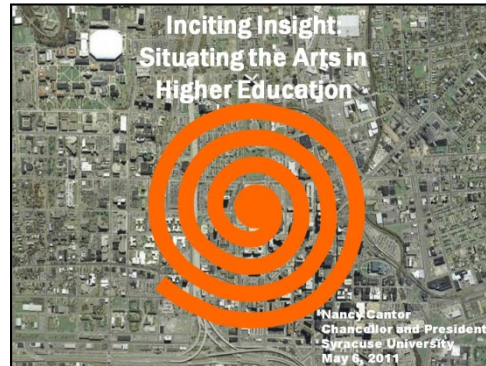
This morning, after two very lively days of discussion, I'm glad to have a chance to address the "nuts and bolts" of models and metrics for situating the arts in higher education. This matters profoundly because the arts already suffuse our society and culture as sources of connectedness, continuity and meaning. I think what Susan Sontag said of photography is true of all the arts, that they are the "arm of consciousness," and that they "make up and thicken the environment we recognize as modern."[2]

The arts speak to the fundamental values of higher education, and they have practices and features that make them relevant to many disciplines and to education writ large. They're ripe for integration throughout our institutions, and I'll begin by saying that several existing models for the arts and art-making can provide excellent sites and platforms for the task at hand.

The first is the stand-alone model, a school or college dedicated to the arts and art-making, such as the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the School of Architecture at SU, or the School of Art and Design, the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and the School of Music at the University of Michigan.

A second model embeds the arts and art-making into schools, colleges, and departments whose central focus is not on the arts and art-making per se. At Syracuse, these include, for example, design work in the College of Engineering, art-making in our entrepreneurship courses in the School of Information Studies, and documentary theater with the public diplomacy program that crosses the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

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[1] Keynote address at the national conference titled "Art-Making, the Arts, and the Research University," hosted by ArtsEngine, University of Michigan, May 4-6, 2011.
[2] Susan Sontag, "On Photography," discussed by John Berger in his chapter on "Uses of Photography," written in 1978 and collected in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1984) pp 48-63.

The third model encompasses institutions and organizations that are "public goods," such as museums, galleries, library special collections, theaters, musical societies, and other arts-presenting units that serve everyone but are "owned" by no one unit.

Many research universities have all or most of these models, and we want them to flourish. At the same time, we want to encourage a blending and interplay between them, and we want to move from one-shot collaborations and programs to models that can be sustained.

Creating New Models

Today I'd like to describe and give examples of four ways to create these "mixed" or integrated models that draw on specific arts-focused disciplines and arts-related public goods and also on the interests and talents of students and faculty throughout the university. I'll also talk about the challenges these models present to what are considered "normal" practices, and how we can know if they're succeeding.

Collaborative Art-Making

The first model, which I'll call collaborative art-making, integrates art and art-making across the disciplines to create signature experiences that can be small in scale—a single project or a single course---or an entire degree-granting program.

At Syracuse, the deans of the iSchool (the School of Information Studies) and VPA (the College of Visual and Performing Arts) put up seed money for collaborative art-making, an initiative they called *Common Ground.* They wanted to explore the rich ways that artistic modes of thinking and the scientific method can complement and synergize each other.

One project lasted just three days. They invited 36 students, from freshmen to graduate students, to join with professionals in taking on a large question. The students, who came from different fields and from seven different colleges, participated in a charette, a learning experience that's often used in design classes but not so much in other fields. Its short but intense duration encourages quick thinking and collaboration.

In this case, the subject was the future of social media, a universe where 500 million users post 5 billion items on Facebook, upload more than 2 billion videos on YouTube, and "tweet" 55 million times in a single day. The focus was relatively narrow: the future impact of social media on business.

The participants worked in small, multidisciplinary teams at COLAB, the center for collaborative design for VPA. Although their final presentations reached far beyond such business-oriented topics as advertising and marketing in the social media to ideas about values, ownership, privacy, education, and governance, the most profound insight was that "everyone is an expert on something," as David Rosen, an undergraduate majoring in information science and finance, said afterwards.

Other colleges at SU have also tried collaborative art-making by integrating it into a joint course. The L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science and the Newhouse School, combined a senior mechanical engineering capstone course with an advertising class. The engineers learn and practice the type of creativity it takes to re-imagine their technology as a consumer good. At the same time, the advertising students learn about the creativity involved in creating new technology. The students work in groups to create an advertising campaign for the student designs.

The National Science Foundation funded another model, Shell Structures, to foster dialogue and collaboration between architecture and engineering. Shells are a place where the aesthetics of architecture and the solutions of engineering converge, where "the thing you see and the thing that holds the building are one and the same," as Sinead MacNamara, a professor of structural engineering in the School of Architecture explains it. The architecture students come up with the shapes, and then the engineering students collaborate to make shapes they can actually build.

We've also created broader models of a collaborative curriculum, and we're very excited about two graduate programs. One of them, Design+, hopes to create a new generation of leaders in interdisciplinary design, technology and innovation. It's a studio-based experience, where students work in groups, and it leads to a Master of Fine Arts degree in Collaborative Design.

 It's housed in the design department of VPA with links to five other colleges, to our cross-campus entrepreneurship initiative, and to organizations such as the Burton Blatt Institute, a center of research and advocacy for persons with disabilities, and the Syracuse Center of Excellence, which collaborates with 200 companies and institutions on issues of energy and the environment.

The other example is the Goldring Arts Journalism Program. It's based in the Newhouse School and involves VPA, Architecture, and the College of Arts and Sciences. It's a master's program to teach journalists, many of whom have experience in the arts world already, to translate the arts into a variety of media in words, images and sound.

As Johanna Keller, the director of the program likes to say, "The work of a journalist is much like that of the artist, for they both fashion something entirely new out of traditional and contemporary materials. Just as art is a translation of the artist's experience of the world, arts journalism is the translation of the experience of a work of art through another medium."

The Arts Presenter and University-Wide Themes

A second model integrates the arts and art-making in thematic ways that stretch across the university. To do this, we, for example, created the position of university arts presenter at SU three years ago and chose Carole Brzozowski, formerly the dean of VPA. We've asked her to promote and patronize the arts in ways that infuse them into the university's academic programs. This requires establishing ongoing relationships with scholars, artists and the larger community. As this occurs, the arts can serve as catalysts for new scholarship, new forms of art, and new partnerships that bring outside talent into the university's ongoing themes and commitments.

One of her projects is a model of the way this can work. It began with Cyprien Mihigo, a refugee from genocide in the Congo who graduated from SU in 2007. He had begun interviewing other refugees about their experiences. He realized that victims and victimizers were living elbow to elbow in Syracuse, and he thought live theater could be a vehicle for reconciliation.

Mihigo approached Kyle Bass, the dramaturg at Syracuse Stage, about creating a play based on their stories. Syracuse Stage is the professional theater in residence at SU. After hearing Mihigo's proposal, Bass remembered earlier work in Syracuse by Ping Chong & Co., a documentary theater director in New York City, and went to Brzozowski, as arts presenter, to see if she could get him back.

CRY FOR PEACE:
VOICES FROM THE CONGO

"Cry for Peace: Voices from the Congo," with a cast chosen from the Congolese community, opened last December as a workshop on Syracuse Stage. It quickly demonstrated for us how university-wide themes and initiatives are served so well by the arts. It became, for example, part of the university's 2010 Symposium, "Conflict: Peace and War." The symposium, organized through the SU Humanities Center, also included our eighth annual Human Rights Film Festival and, among many other things, an examination of the music of conflict and

reconciliation, including the music of Japanese internment camps and Nazi Germany, post 9/11 music, and music of the Iraq war.

When "Cry for Peace" was staged a second time, in New York City, three Congolese members of the audience stepped forward and said they wanted to work for reconciliation. Next fall, "Cry for Peace" will be part of a symposium on cultural diplomacy at Georgetown, and Brzozowski is working with an organization in Belgium in the hope of taking the play, the cast, and some SU students to Kinshasa for a performance in 2012.

"Projects have a life," Brzozowski told me recently. "You think you know when they're done, but this one is not done yet."

*Meshing the Curricular and Co-Curricular*

Another way to embed the arts and art-making in the research university is to mix the curricular and co-curricular – "work" in the classroom and "play" outside of it – often in the service of pursuing broader pressing issues of our world.

At SU, we see this happening successfully in the context of campus-wide concerns about environmental sustainability. One example, *The Canary Project*, builds on work begun in 2006 at Indiana University by two artist-activists, Susannah Sayler and Edward Morris. They wanted to use art-making as a way to deepen understandings of human-induced global warming and galvanize others to join in the search for solutions.

Sayler and Morris are continuing the project at SU, where they are faculty members in the TransMedia program. Over the years their powerful photographs (such as this one, of the glacial icecap and permafrost melting on King George Island in Antarctica) have appeared on buses, city halls, and galleries as part of a larger discourse, *A History of the Future*. A companion work includes sound-art pieces, interviews asking people how they're reacting to climate change. The title is: *We Could Just Leave.*

Playing off this theme, Sayler and Morris collaborated last fall in a charette at COLAB called *There is no AWAY*. They joined 46 students from programs across the university to look close to home, at the university's Climate Action Plan to reduce our net greenhouse emissions to zero, and to create ways to wake up their peers and get them involved.
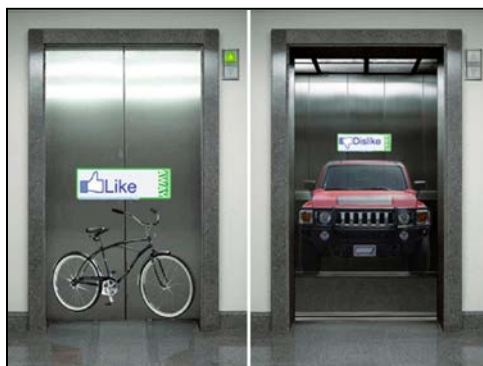
Campus-Community Engagements

Another important platform for integrating the arts and art-making with other disciplines and with the broad animating purposes of higher education is through the role that we play as public goods. The arts and art-making can be integrated easily into so many aspects of our communities, from K-12 collaborations to neighborhood re-designs to environmental and economic development projects of all sorts. At SU, where we are keenly aware of our role as an anchor institution in our older industrial city, the arts and art-making are right at the center of this work.

An innovative cluster on collaborative design in the City is led by VPA and Architecture. In all, it includes eight SU schools and colleges and focuses on art and design, technology, and sustainability and how the disciplines can help address the national challenges of revitalizing cities such as Syracuse.

Through our Near Westside Initiative, for example, a long-neglected neighborhood, the 9th poorest census tract in the U.S., is quite literally buzzing with activity as architects, engineers, geographers, technologists, entrepreneurs, artists and designers collaborate with industry, government, non-profits and residents.


To take just one of dozens of examples from what's going on in this community, SU students have joined students from Fowler High School and from the neighborhood center P.E.A.C.E. Inc. in pioneering courses on Photography and Literacy taught by photographer Stephen Mahan. These experiences have had a profound effect on the lives of everyone

involved. For our students, participation creates eye-opening opportunities to be both expert and novice, teacher and learner, all in one experience, as they and their school district "peers" each find their vision and voice.

As Mahan says, "You can tell a story without being able to read on a certain level or write on a certain level. English doesn't have to be your first language. You might have Asperger's, autism, a learning disability, whatever you want to call it. Instantly, right off the bat, the camera seems to level that playing field."
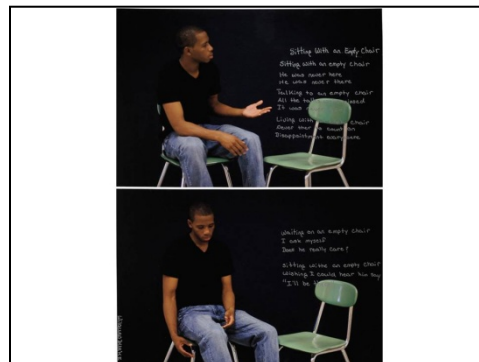
At Fowler, where many of the students are first generation residents and speak 21 different languages, Mahan has been focusing this year on questions of identity, such as "What do you think being an American means?"
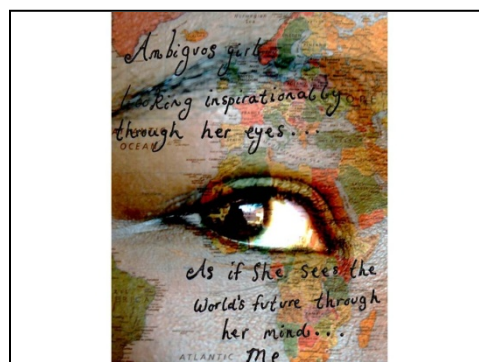
Their answers, told through photography, are always put on display in public exhibitions that invite the students, their friends and families, their teachers, the university, and the general public.

Challenging the "Normal"

A central feature of good art and art-making is that it disrupts the normal, changes routines, and encourages innovation. This is tremendously exciting and adds to the intellectual vibrancy of our campuses and communities, but it also challenges many of the normal practices of the academy, especially when art-making is integrated across a university rather than focused in stand-alone units. Hence as we pursue more integrative models, we need to be prepared for disruptions. Here are some examples drawn from the four types of models I've just described.

Collaborative curricula and scholarship: The collaboration that is often at the heart of the integrated models of art-making is not always something that faculty and students are used to doing. It can be disruptive in both substantive and routine ways. Often the disjunction is about figure and ground – what for example takes precedence in collaborations between architects and engineers, the design or the stability of the structure.

In the design of cross-school and college signature programs, like our Goldring Arts Journalism Program, for example, there are always choices to be made about the relative weight given to the fundamentals of each discipline or craft – how immersed in the arts does the arts journalist need to be; how technically savvy with digital media should the performer turned journalist be?

Students doing double majors or minors across fields---say, for example, combining design, information studies, and entrepreneurship---can easily get caught in the cross-hairs of different advising systems, different requirements, and different schedules. While these may be mundane disruptions, they can derail the integration process if we don't work to reduce such conflicts.

Cross-university themes: We've seen how effective the arts and art-making are as a university-wide platform for dialogue and action on themes such as sustainability, diversity, globalism, technology, and entrepreneurship. However, the success of such projects often depends on a certain generosity on the part of domain experts – giving over control to the project as a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

When the charettes in the *The Canary Project* or in *Common Ground* are in full throttle, for example, the expertise of the environmental engineer or the social media guru may well fall off the board, succumbing to the disruptions of more free-flowing design thinking. This speaks to the potential for the arts and art-making to be a strongly democratic and inclusive form of engagement, one that requires a certain suspension of judgment on the part of any one participant or expert.

Curricular and co-curricular meshing: Similarly, when the arts and art-making start popping up all over the creative campus, work that might normally be considered co-curricular starts constituting curriculum for some students, and faculty engaged in these collaborative projects start blurring the boundary of what constitutes scholarship in their disciplines.

For example, *Common Ground* invited members of the SU community, including students, faculty, and staff to compete to create artworks for the iSchool's Hinds Hall. As iSchool professor Art Thomas said when the project was unveiled, the idea was "to reconnect us with our humanity and that side of us that we often ignore in terms of technology"[3]

Thomas Day, the only student winner, called his installation of three tall laser cut Plexiglas forms *Connectivity* to highlight the connections between the iSchool's focus on content, technology and people.
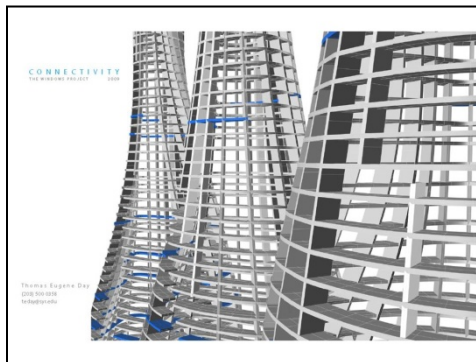
As we consider the products of the *Windows* competition, we see clearly the blurring of boundaries, not only between the humanistic disciplines and the world of technology, but between the work we do as play and the play that might well constitute "work."   Should the architecture student winner of the iSchool *Windows Project* get "credit" toward his degree?

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[3] Carrren Jao, "The Windows Project features installations designed and created by artists in the SU Community," NewsHouse, October 29, 2009, online at http://www.thenewshouse.com/story/ischool-bridges-art-and-technology Accessed April 24, 2011.

In another example of blurred boundaries, the arts and the sciences can use the same experiences and the same materials at the same time in ways that are useful and illuminating but for different reasons. Robert Wysocki, a sculpture professor at SU, has teamed up with geologist Jeff Karson to explore the properties of molten igneous rock as it flows in an essentially natural state from Wysocki's makeshift outdoor furnace at temperatures that reach up to 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. Our cold weather gives them the chance to do lava pours on sloping ice ramps and simulated ice channels to investigate processes that have occurred in eruptions in ice-covered areas like Iceland and Mars. It's also a chance to examine the potential of lava as a new medium for art.

Wysocki, who has a long-standing interest in sculpting large-scale natural land forms, has made several pieces from the pours. "I consider myself to be a landscape painter," he says, "but I don't paint." And while his Lava landscapes clearly count as art, can the same work be considered a scholarly product for Jeff Karson, the earth scientist?

Campus-community engagement: As the arts and art-making become platforms for civic engagement, questions about blurred lines of scholarship are especially common. Work such as designing or re-designing our cities must be collaborative, and it demands that we relinquish disciplinary supremacy. Often, the process involves a turning of the tables on who is the expert and who is the novice (faculty, students, adults or children, residents or university members).

Most certainly, it strains our standard definitions of scholarly products and peer review, and it thoroughly blurs the line between teaching, research, and public engagement or service. At SU, we have begun to address these issues by re-writing our tenure and promotion documents, informed by Imagining America's initiative on rewarding public scholarship. We are also starting to see many more interdisciplinary appointments with MOUs to define more broad-ranging peer groups, including a deeper engagement of professionals working side-by-side with more traditional academics.

Supporting Scale, Longevity, and Impact

In keeping with the historic stance of the arts as revolutionary elements in society, it may well be that the true measure or metric of our success in integrating them into research universities is *how much disruption* occurs to our normal practices, silos, career recipes, distinct roles, and other aspects of university life.   If we can move from mere disruption to institutional transformation, we can then begin to assess how "normal" these practices become by looking at measures of *scale, impact, and longevity*. In particular, we can measure the degree to which institutions and units within institutions make commitments----from funding to appointments to space and partnerships---that ensure that the arts and arts-making are integrated on a scale that is sustainable for an extended period of time, with broad-reaching impact on audiences and participants.

A collaborative curriculum may well begin with a single course that integrates art or art-making with another discipline. It may combine similar disciplines---such as architecture and engineering ---or more distantly related ones, such as art and earth sciences. Collaborative scholarship can also begin with unplanned encounters between individual scholars who get excited about the possibility of working together.
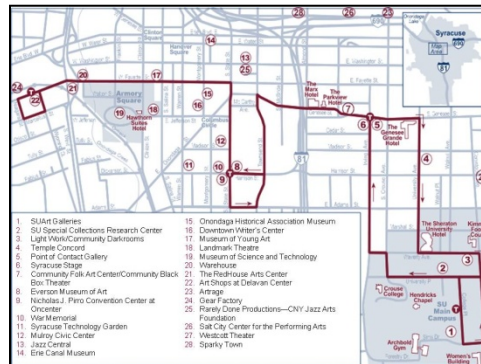
The question is: How do we ensure that these collaborations have a shelf life long enough to evolve, surprise, and engage scholars and students beyond their initial offerings?

Civil Infrastructure for the Arts and Art-Making: My answer comes from an experience I had many years ago as an advisor to the engineering directorate at NSF. I was working with a group on civil infrastructure – a far stretch for a social psychologist. When I asked their experts to define "civil infrastructure," they replied, "Large things attached to the ground." Ever since, I have kept this term in mind as the metric or test of durability and impact. We need to integrate the arts and art-making into collaborative curricula and scholarly projects as if we were building civil infrastructure in our institutions.

In fact, sometimes, we actually want to start by building real civil infrastructure to house the arts and spread art-making through our communities. That is what we have done at SU, in downtown Syracuse.   The Warehouse, an old furniture warehouse that we redesigned in 2005 is home to VPA's design programs, to COLAB, and to our School of Architecture's UPSTATE Center for design, research, and development, as well as the Near Westside Initiative.

It anchors another of our civil infrastructure arts projects, the Connective Corridor, a strip of cutting-edge cultural development that is being built to connect the campus with downtown Syracuse.

1. SUArt Galleries
2. SU Special Collections Research Center
3. Light Work/Community Darkrooms
4. Temple Concord
5. Point of Contact Gallery
6. Syracuse Stage
7. Community Folk Art Center/Community Black Box Theater
8. Everson Museum of Art
9. Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center at Oncenter
10. War Memorial
11. Syracuse Technology Garden
12. Mulroy Civic Center
13. Jazz Central
14. Erie Canal Museum
15. Onondaga Historical Association Museum
16. Downtown Writer's Center
17. Museum of Young Art
18. Landmark Theatre
19. Museum of Science and Technology
20. Warehouse
21. The RedHouse Arts Center
22. Art Shops at Delavan Center
23. Artrage
24. Gear Factory
25. Rarely Done Productions—CNY Jazz Arts Foundation
26. Salt City Center for the Performing Arts
27. Westcott Theater
28. Sparky Town

The Corridor itself is a site for experimenting with new materials for the sidewalks, devising sustainable storm-water management systems, and designing energy-saving lighting and historically informative signage.

In 2007, a team of students and faculty in the design program at VPA started the Urban Video Project on the Corridor. It has now evolved into one of the first permanent series of urban projection installations in the nation. It's managed by SU's Coalition of Museums and Art Centers and includes three building facades where video displays ranging from photography to poetry are projected every day from dusk to 11 p.m.   It features work by nationally renowned professional artists, such as Bill Viola's piece displayed on the side of The Everson Museum, and by students and local residents as well.


The path of Corridor crosses what was once the 15th Ward, one of the only neighborhoods where African Americans could live, that was obliterated for urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 81.
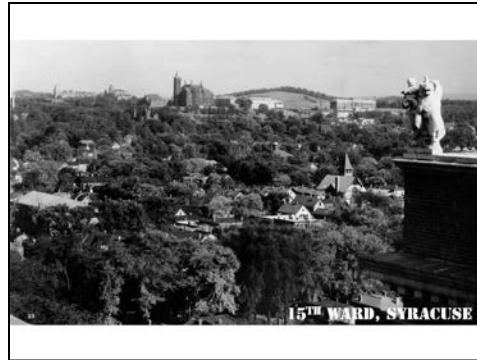
When the neighborhood vanished, its black residents were pushed to the Near Westside and to the South Side of the city.

SU's South Side Initiative has been working to empower former residents---and their descendants—to retrieve and celebrate this vanished past through the Black History Preservation Project. In collaboration with the iSchool, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the SU Library, they're creating a virtual museum that will open in June to celebrate Black history and heritage in Syracuse and Central New York.
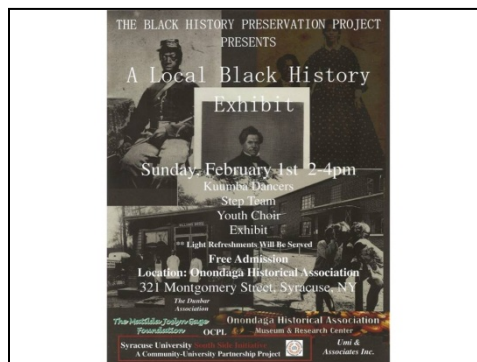
The Project, which has produced a documentary, "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond," has trained South Side residents to collect oral histories. They've also been invited to community workshops to learn how to preserve, archive, and search the internet for genealogical information, and they've held a history fair to share significant pictures and documents.

The Connective Corridor and projects on it like the Urban Video and the Black History Preservation Project constitute visible civil infrastructure for the arts. Other times, this civil infrastructure is more dispersed as in the *Common Ground* Projects seeded by VPA and the iSchool. In this case, the collaborations start small, almost subversively working their way into more and more courses and projects. For example, in *Common Ground*, collaborative activity kept popping up in different places and practices, taking on a life of its own with some durability.

The repetition and the variety build a certain momentum. Suddenly we see iSchool faculty publishing articles on "Information Studios: Integrating Arts-Based Learning into the Education of Information Professionals" and VPA students taking minors in Global Enterprise Technology or the iSchool's entrepreneurship sequence from "What's the Big Idea" to "Ideas2Startup." Soon the collaborative intersection of information studies and design (and more generally VPA) becomes a signature program in the university--- civil infrastructure! Then we see degree programs, such as Design+, being built to last across disciplines.


The key to the success, I believe, is the constant mixing of relatively top-down seed funding and support with broadly bottom-up enthusiasm for the partnerships. In the case of *Common Ground*, for example, the two deans seeded the projects, but scores of students and faculty jumped on board quickly.

The infusion of external support mixed with institutional cost-sharing can have the same contagious effect – encouraging units to build that collaborative infrastructure for the future. A grant from the Mellon Foundation enabled our special collections professionals in the Library to team up with and receive cost-sharing commitments from four of our schools and colleges ---the Maxwell School, the Newhouse School, VPA, and the College of Arts and Sciences to integrate our extraordinary Belfer Audio Laboratory and Archive, all 500,000 recordings, into scholarship and curriculum across these multiple disciplines.

And this model of external funding, institutional cost sharing, and department-to-department commitment can be even more powerful in arts collaborations across institutions, as we have seen in Central New York. Another Mellon grant enabled SU, Rochester, and Cornell to construct the CNY Humanities Corridor led by humanities institute directors and deans at each institution and built to last through working groups of faculty spanning topics from "Visual Arts and Culture" to "Music History/Musicology" to "Digital Humanities" and "Archives and

Media." The synergies have been extraordinary, particularly in a time when each institution by itself is hard-pressed to cover the expansive intellectual ground here on its own.
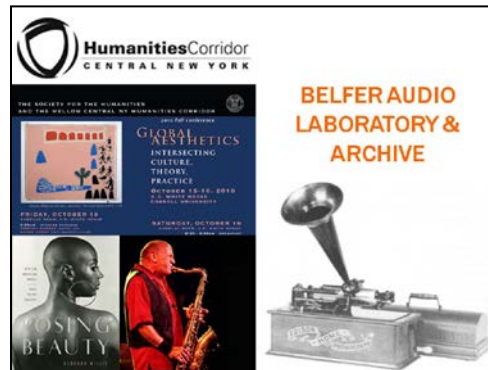
Balancing Solidity, Purpose, and Surprise

As we consider these multiple opportunities and platforms for integrating the arts and art-making into the civil infrastructure of research universities, I am drawn to the special way in which art captivates by being simultaneously disruptive and calming. Both art as "product" and art-making as "process" manage to jar us into clarity of vision, often about the human condition, and still fill us with all the right impulses to partner broadly to make a difference. The challenge, to refer back to Susan Sontag, is to create in our universities a "thick" environment – full of solidity and purpose – in which the arts and art-making can still surprise, keep us modern.

We certainly see this in Syracuse, as designers and architects, engineers and technologists, artists and educators immerse themselves in the cultural narrative of redemption and revival facing our older industrial city. The solidity of civil infrastructure for the arts and art-making is a centerpiece of this work, as we see in the work of graffiti artist Steve Powers, who wrote "A Love Letter to Syracuse" on railroad bridges in the Near Westside.

Yet within the solidity, there is massive disruption and innovation going on, as our Connective Corridor buses wrapped by our design students grab attention, inviting everyone along for the ride. And quite a ride it is, when the arts and art-making give hope and a cause to children and grandmothers, artists and scientists, all pushing the envelope of possibility, in a way

that screams out with calm success. That is the arts and art-making at their best and most empowering – "the arm of consciousness" as Susan Sontag eloquently reminds us.

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