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Higher Education and the Arts in the  
United States

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES

*A Statement of the Working Group on the Arts in Higher Education*

Great achievements in the arts are the hallmarks of civilization. Generating conditions to encourage these achievements is essential business for any society. We Americans have entrusted primary responsibility for the nation's artistic development to our institutions of higher education...

... and, especially since the 1920s, these institutions have

- o brought large numbers of Americans visual and performing artists to high levels of excellence;
- o been primarily responsible for the growth of public literacy in the arts;
- o provided the means for thousands of artists to continue their work, and a forum for the development and presentation of their creative ideas;
- o developed a truly national capability for future cultural achievement.

The 1990s find the arts in higher education one of the largest components of the national arts enterprise. The higher education component is fundamental to the success of all other arts efforts; this document describes its contributions, its features, and its promise.

### **Quality: The Measure of Excellence**

Quality is based on individual achievement. Therefore, in a national sense, quality in the arts can only be measured by combining the capabilities in the arts disciplines held by individual Americans. Of course, these capabilities include the work of gifted creators and performers, but they also include the degree of each citizen's literacy in the arts, and thus each individual's ability to make cultural choices based upon acquired skills and knowledge.

Quality is often discussed in immediate terms: for example, the quality of a specific exhibition or performance. However, there is another equally important approach. This approach views quality as an attribute developed through incremental steps. As such, it is related to a fundamental premise of education where the focus most often is on an eventual rather than an immediate product.

For decades, institutions of higher education have developed individual talents and abilities in the arts. In their work, the immediate and developmental approaches to quality share attention and support: the immediate through the presentation and evaluation of works of art by students, faculty and guest artists; the developmental through the processes of education, training, policy development, and research.

Through the wisdom and skills of those committed to individual knowledge as the basis of democracy, unparalleled resources have been invested in this educational enterprise throughout the nation. The result is that the quality of professional training in such disciplines as dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts has been raised to levels internationally recognized as being the highest in the world.

### **A Unique American Vision**

Americans began significant expansion of the arts in higher education shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century. Our nation evolved an approach grounded in European tradition, yet significantly different from it. The European tradition was preserved through a focus on intensive training and technical excellence for professional artists. The American contribution was the principle that all artists would benefit from the elements of a liberal education. The full development of the artist as well as the individual citizen was assigned to institutions of higher education.

Another concept grew from recognition of the need for a wide variety of education and training resources within higher education. Professional studio schools, independent conservatories and colleges of the arts, and schools and departments

of the arts disciplines in colleges and universities represent a complete spectrum of educational objectives. A fundamental principle, therefore, is the maintenance of diversity, so that the concepts of liberal and professional education may be approached in many ways.

A third principle reflecting commitment to opportunity for the people of a large nation has been distribution of educational resources throughout our geographic domain.

The interaction of these principles produces a unique American approach which includes the professional training of artists within the mainstream of higher education across the length and breadth of our nation. This approach has called into being a concentration of three primary and interrelated goals and responsibilities for the arts in American higher education:

- o the education and training of professional artists;
- o the development of teachers of the arts; and
- o the development of the highest possible degree of literacy in the arts in the population as a whole.

This expanded concept, which integrates the objectives of professional training with those of higher education, broadly conceived, has generated massive benefits for the cultural growth of the American people.

### **The Contributions of Cultural Leadership**

The arts in higher educations have their roots in teaching, learning, creation, and presentation. The maintenance of an appropriate climate for these requires a set of conditions having significant impact not only on those studying for a career in the arts, but on the broader community as well.

### **The Development of Professional Artists and Arts Educators**

- o Many young Americans have aspirations for careers in the arts. This remains true even in a difficult job market. After high school, the nation's young artists turn to institutions providing professional training in the arts. The primary emphasis in these institutions is the development of professional competence by expanding individual talents, interests, and philosophies.
- o The aspiring artist can choose from a variety of institutions. There are differences in size and type as well as of institutional and programmatic objectives. The principal areas of training are creation and presentation of art, education in the arts at the elementary and secondary levels, and historical, theoretical, and educational research. Other important areas such as arts therapies, religious arts, arts business and management, and technological applications of the arts are available at numerous institutions.
- o Professional artists and teachers of the arts do not simply appear. Their basic talents must be identified and honed to a high degree of competence. Thus, individuals receiving professional training at institutions of higher education continue to take their places at the center of the national arts enterprise. They preserve and expand our cultural heritage, educate our future artists, and teach the arts to our citizens. They contribute significantly to the continuity of our civilization.

### **Education in the Arts for the Public**

- o The geographic distribution of resources for the development of professional artists makes possible a broad range of education for the public. Arts faculties working with young professionals are also deeply involved in teaching the arts to college students who have avocational interest in the arts. We hold that much of the present

public support for the arts can be traced to course work, amateur performance, and studio activity undertaken as part of college experience.

- o Higher education is the source of professional education for those who will teach the arts at the elementary/secondary levels and beyond.
- o Institutions of higher education provide myriad services to public school efforts in arts education beyond teacher training. Educational research, curriculum development, in-service training for teachers, and other arts efforts of assistance to public schools are standard for most institutions.
- o Many professional training institutions are also engaged in providing instruction to pre-college students of the arts. The resources of the institution, especially the resources of faculty and advanced student personnel, create a continuum of learning benefiting the entire community.
- o Continuing education in the arts is provided by numerous institutions. The offerings range from course work related to the programs of local presentation organizations such as the orchestra, repertory theatre, dance company, or museum, to instruction in performance and scholarly studies.

#### **Art Resources for Communities**

- o Institutions of higher education are frequently the cultural centers of their communities. They remain among the most significant presenters of the arts in the nation. Performing arts events and exhibition schedules open to the public dot the calendar of every institution. In every community, higher education's facilities for the arts are utilized by the public for presentations originating from campus, from the local community, or from professional presenters.
- o Institutions of higher education engaged in teaching the arts necessarily become a concentration of professional expertise, research capability, and presentation activity. Resident faculties of professional artists are essential to the preservation and growth of professional presentation organizations. Numerous orchestras, performing companies, and museums could not survive were it not for the affiliations of many of their personnel with higher education. The presence of distinguished faculty and advanced students provide a core of artistic expertise not only for teaching but for cultural policy development as well.
- o Preservation of our cultural heritage is another major role played by the higher education community. Works of historical significance, yet unknown to the public, are frequently presented. The result often is an enlargement of the standard repertory. Other major contributions are the restoration and conservation of works of art, the maintenance of archives, the support of historical and cultural research, and studies in preservation policy.

#### **The Support of Art and Artists**

- o Artists of both established and developing reputation are working in higher education throughout the nation, in both full- and part-time situations, as regular faculty/staff and as consultants. A base of employment in higher education allows many artists the economic freedom to pursue their creative work. In addition, the employment and promotion policies of institutions encourage creative work with evaluation of this work serving the same function as the evaluation of research in the sciences.
- o Institutions provide a laboratory for experimentation and development in the arts. New works are commissioned and tested, technical breakthroughs are achieved through the integration of science and art, and interdisciplinary work flourishes.
- o More new work is presented by institutions of higher education than by any other presenter of the arts in the

United States. This phenomenon has provided a broad geographic distribution to the frontiers of artistic creation. The result is unparalleled richness and variety.

- o Institutions are major presenters of professional artists; performers and visual artists are brought to campuses in large numbers. These performances and exhibitions are significant in the livelihoods of many artists. Without the sponsorship of higher education, the opportunities for professional artists would be drastically reduced.

## **Sustaining the Quality of Effort**

The return on our nation's investment in the arts in higher education has resulted in the distribution of quality cultural resources on an unprecedented scale. Having described the basic structures, goals, and achievements through which higher education serves the needs of America's cultural development, our attention now focuses on four critical elements essential to the future of this enterprise.

### **Governance**

- o A principal strength underlying the growth of the arts in higher education and society as a whole has been the freedom to develop without control of education and culture by the federal government.
- o Specific academic governance in higher education is traditionally the province of the faculty. The entrusting of such functions to those with the greatest expertise is consistent with the highest principles of successful professional work in the arts.
- o Beyond specific academic issues, the arts in higher education share the traditions of governance present in all higher education. These traditions include respecting academic freedom and allowing the pursuit of work in the arts without regard to political or ideological interference. Faculty expertise, academic governance traditions, and principles of academic freedom are central to realization of the principle of diversity in the arts in higher education.
- o The higher education community has adopted basic standards for awarding degrees and other credentials in the arts. Institutions volunteer to be judged by these standards. The standards represent frameworks for a wide variety of institutional approaches, not a national curriculum. This system is consistent with that used by other professions.

### **Funding**

- o Millions of dollars are spent each year in operational expenses for the arts in higher education. These expenditures represent both private and public funds. Private funds are derived from tuition, endowment and scholarship funds, and student fees. Public funds are derived from the general appropriations of state and federal education agencies. The funding patterns for higher education in the arts were established long before the development of local, state, and federal arts agencies. Therefore, government-sponsored arts councils concentrate their limited funds primarily on the creation and presentation of art outside higher education. They cannot be expected to undertake comprehensive responsibilities for education in the arts.
- o The public's private and tax support of the arts through higher education has developed a mechanism of cultural enrichment based in the nonprofit sector. Were the functions of this mechanism to be carried by the profit sector, it would be unaffordable, especially if the scale of geographic distribution that public and private educational institutions now offer were to be maintained.
- o All institutions, public or private, raise funds for arts activities from the private sector. The funding of the arts in higher education thus represents a three-way funding partnership of philanthropy, tax support, and users' contributions such as tuition and admission fees.
- o The presentation of work by both students and professionals is an essential part of the educational process. Presentations of art on campus are often less expensive to produce than in professional circumstances. Thus, facilities and personnel available to serve educational functions frequently are placed in the service of presentation for the entire community at greatly reduced cost.

### **Elementary/Secondary Education in the Arts**

- o In addition to public and private general schools, elementary/secondary education in the arts takes place in a variety of settings. These include private studios, community schools of the arts, arts high schools, and the education programs of professional presentation institutions such as symphony orchestras; dance, theatre, and opera companies; and museums. Although work in each of these settings is essential, nothing can replace sequential curricula in at least one and preferably all of the arts disciplines as regular courses in the elementary and secondary schools. The concept of sequential curricula is central to developing basic abilities in language, math, sciences, and history; it is no less applicable to teaching and learning the arts.
- o strong elementary/secondary education programs in the arts are essential for the continuing development of our nation's cultural promise. Since work at this level represents the earliest efforts in a lifelong program to develop individual literacy in the arts, the degree of our success influences the degree to which arts resources in higher education can be most fully utilized and, ultimately, the degree to which individual capabilities in the arts will be developed.
- o The arts enterprise in higher education is committed to elementary/secondary education in the arts. The training of specialist teachers in the arts, essential for the development and operation of curricula which develop literacy, is a major priority. In addition, the continuing development of a knowledgeable and supportive public through course work and arts experiences for the general college student builds the base of citizen support for elementary/secondary arts education.

### **Policy Development**

- o Democratic principles inspire a free and open exchange of views in the development of policy. At maximum effectiveness, these exchanges necessarily involve all with an interest in the outcomes of the policy process. Our pluralistic democracy relies on many elements to maintain the policies necessary for cultural formation: there is no single governmental or non-governmental organization making national policy for the arts. Our nation's arts policy is an aggregation of policies pursued by the public and private sectors at local, state, and national levels.
- o Higher education in the arts represents an historic and fundamental force shaping the highest aspirations of American civilization. Its institutions and individuals can contribute much to policy discussions beyond their immediate operations. Higher education has the resources for effective partnership with others concerned about the arts. Well utilized, these resources will play a major role in broadening policy considerations by continuing to improve the quality of debate and policy synthesis.

### **The Possibilities of Future Achievement**

American civilization represents a great and successful experiment in democracy. The talents and innovative spirit of our people are our most significant treasures.

During the first nine decades of the twentieth century, we have come to learn more about the importance of the arts to our nation's well-being. Arts efforts in higher education have been fundamental to this realization.

Our emphasis on the highest educational standards for the development of professional artists has created unique resources for general education in the arts. Even though much has already been done, our next challenge is increased utilization of these resources in combination with others to produce greater general literacy in the arts disciplines for individual Americans.

Uniquely American principles for the arts in higher education must be maintained. This involves the highest quality of



professional training in the mainstream of higher education, broadly conceived; ensuring a diversity of institutional programs and objectives; and providing an appropriate geographic distribution of resources.

America's institutions of higher education must be able to continue developing highly skilled artists and teachers of the arts and highly educated and literate supporters of the arts. Without a significant body of competent professionals at all levels, the nation cannot develop its cultural potential. Without a large body of artistically literate citizens, support for cultural endeavor of the highest order is fragile and in danger of extinction.

The arts in higher education represent a core of expertise and professional commitment based in substance. Joined appropriately with the strengths of other sectors of the arts, we will not fail to produce a cultural effort of transcendent importance and meaning. The potential benefits to our nation and the world are incalculable.

The Working Group on the Arts in Higher Education is a cooperative project of National Association of Schools of Music, National Association of Schools of Art and Design, National Association of Schools of Theatre, National Association of Schools of Dance, and International Council of Fine Arts Deans. These organizations represent the academic and administrative leadership of over 1,000 postsecondary schools and departments providing professional education and training to artists and teachers of the arts as well as arts instruction for all college students.

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