The Arts and What If?

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Fall semester marks the beginning of a new academic year, and across the college campus units are busy with job descriptions and candidate interviews for faculty and upper-level administrative positions. Excitement is always in the air when we think about the prospects of new colleagues and what they may bring to the university community.

The recent conversations that I have most enjoyed were those with the applicants for the position of Director of the Lamar Dodd School of Art, the University of Georgia (UGA). The School houses 15 undergraduate and 10 graduate programs and serves approximately 900 students studying ceramics, sculpture, fabric design, jewelry and metal work, printmaking and bookmaking, and scientific illustration, to name only a few. The center of activity is a light-filled and spacious 150,000 sq. ft. building featuring three galleries and carefully designed studio space. Approximately 80 full-time faculty members create art and instruct the talented art students.

The School's website shows the full array of interesting curricular offerings, exhibitions, and research by permanent and visiting scholars, as well as students (<http://art.uga.edu/>). Also prominently displayed under the link "studies abroad" is UGA's year-round program in studio art in Cortona, Italy, which has been in existence for over 40 years and is likely the best known of our study abroad programs (<http://art.uga.edu/programs/studies-abroad/cortona>). Our students benefit from the many students from other universities who choose to study for a semester in this program throughout the year.

All of this is to say that the conversations with the applicants for the director's position of the School of Art were lively and covered a wide range of topics. For example,

- The role of public universities in perpetuation of the arts, from the nurturing of traditional areas of study to the emergence of study and research in new art forms;
- Challenges posed in funding the arts, which is intensified as post-secondary education moves toward business models, responsibility centered management, or "every tub on its own bottom";
- Building organizational structures to support interdisciplinary collaborations between the arts and other disciplines and professional fields (e.g., engineering, public health);
- Advancing the understanding of art as integral to the economy and its needs and as preparation for employment across diverse sectors;

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- Communicating more effectively the presence and role of art in the society, beyond the simplistic perception of art as “something on the wall” or “contained in a museum”;
- Shifting curricular expectations and demands as emerging art programs, such as art, technology and design, which interact with and effect longstanding and traditional arts programs such as painting and drawing;
- Assessing student learning in the arts and documenting the value of the arts in the achievement of individual, programmatic, and institutional goals.

The last topic, how to account for and demonstrate value in the arts for individuals and institutions, poses a significant challenge when only traditional metrics are used. For example, across the fine arts and humanities access to federal and foundation funds is limited, so research and grant funding will be low as compared to the disciplines in the sciences or social sciences. Additionally, studio courses are limited in the number of students; and thus the number of credit hours generated is small as compared to programs which may incorporate large lecture sections. Yet credit hour production is another source of departmental and school funding.

Non-traditional metrics to establish worth are then highly important; art programs produce not only scholarship in the arts, but they also train the next generation of teachers and artists and business owners, that create and coordinate and contribute to much of what we enjoy as recreation and improved quality of life.

This week I found that the issues of future direction and sponsorship of the arts converged. First, I met with candidates for the art director position; and then I attended multiple arts events on campus as part of UGA’s second annual “Spotlight on the Arts festival” (<http://arts.uga.edu/about/schedule/>). This festival is sponsored by the Arts Council, comprised of unit heads in the literary, performing, and visual arts. What a treat it is to slip away from the desk and meetings to be inspired by readings, informed by documentaries, and whisked to another place by music.

Imagine a world with no movies, literary works, or musical performances; holiday parades without sound and cymbals; investitures and ordinations without song and poem; children’s books without pictures; automobiles and boats, jewelry and fabric— all the same. Illustrations catch our attention; unique souvenirs capture a place. Art is everywhere.

In summary, the arts provide much of the connectivity across human existence and experience; and they may be among the most creative and innovative of our curricular programs. So, I am pleased to say that *Innovative Higher Education* has published on this topic; however, we need to know much more about innovative approaches to assessing the arts, providing art students with interdisciplinary education, and innovative funding. There is much to explore and research, and Associate Editor Kay Gillespie and I welcome your manuscripts on such topics.