

The University of Minnesota
President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Arts and Humanities

Abstract

Through the arts and humanities we explore, express, celebrate, understand, and improve the human condition. The arts and humanities embrace the disciplines through which we create culture, interpret experience, search for the moral and intellectual foundations of society, define our place in the world, and communicate our insights and perspectives. The study of literature, philosophy, music, languages and cultures, the classics, theatre, art, history, and related disciplines poses the most basic questions about human existence: Who are we? Where do we come from? How do we create meaning in our lives? How do we connect and coexist with others across political and cultural differences?

Through teaching, scholarship, and creative work, the arts and humanities give us insight into our own experiences; they nurture our critical thinking, creativity, and imagination; they give us global perspectives; and they develop our cultural competencies, connecting us with our fellow human beings across cultural, historical, and geographic boundaries. The arts and humanities are at the core of great universities, and their vitality is essential to the excellence of the University of Minnesota.

The President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Arts and Humanities is designed to transform arts and humanities scholarship, creative work, and education at the University of Minnesota. Building on existing strengths, the initiative will vault the University of Minnesota to a position of national leadership in the area of humanistic and artistic creativity, scholarship, and education. It will enable us to attract the world's most outstanding students and faculty and stimulate inventive creative works. It will leverage the nearly unrivalled opportunities created by the University's location in one of the nation's most vibrant arts and literary communities and in a state known for the vitality of its cultural life. It will further distinguish the University of Minnesota nationally as a place of innovation and creative risk taking and as an incubator of talent and new knowledge. And it will enable us to more fully meet the needs of University arts and humanities students, who comprise fully one-quarter of the course enrollments at the U.

Initiative #1: Create the University of Minnesota Institute for Advanced Study

The Institute for Advanced Study will promote and support path-breaking collaborative research and creative work in the arts, humanities and social sciences that reshapes the way people think and understand the world, produces theoretical breakthroughs of broad and enduring value, and reframes the fundamental questions that we ask. The Institute will accomplish these goals by providing the space, time, and resources for scholars and artists collaborating across disciplines to explore, from multiple perspectives, ideas and issues at the core of the human condition. The Institute will serve faculty and students in the arts and humanities and social sciences across the University of Minnesota system that are engaged in cutting-edge scholarship and creative work. It will be the incubator for transformative and breakthrough scholarship on critical issues of great consequence for societies.

Initiative #2: Transform Arts and Humanities Education, Scholarship and Creative Work

This initiative will inspire students and faculty to explore critically, and across disciplines, artistic and humanistic knowledge and the creative process; it will enable the development of new paradigms of arts and humanities scholarship and education. It will revolutionize humanistic scholarship and

creative work at the University of Minnesota and transform the educational experience we provide our students with new academic programs that inspire exploration at the edges and intersections of the disciplines.

Stellar new faculty who are national and international leaders in humanistic research and are dedicated to interdisciplinarity in the arts and humanities are key to building these new academic programs. These scholars will be leaders in building a University curriculum in the humanities that provides students with a firm foundation in humanistic modes of inquiry and imbues them with an understanding of the indispensability of the humanities and the arts to the well being of present and future generations. They will help to ensure that research in the humanities remains an essential and vital source of knowledge for and about the contemporary world as well as a sound basis for creative problem-solving on a global scale.

Investment in new faculty will also enable the launch of a new Interdisciplinary Program in Collaborative Arts. The goal of this program is to educate students to be in the vanguard of contemporary art practices and scholarship that crosses disciplinary boundaries. Students will explore new forms of knowledge and creativity, develop forms of artistic expression and experimentation at the edges and intersections of diverse disciplines, and explore the art of creative collaboration across art forms and disciplines. Students will also engage with cutting-edge technologies and complete internships that will enable them to make the leap from the academic to the professional world, whether in arts creation, marketing, and administration or in public policy, health care, education, or other field requiring high levels of creativity and critical thinking.

Initiative #3: Strengthen Public Education and Outreach in the Arts and Humanities

The University contributes to the vitality of Minnesota's cultural life in manifold and powerful ways. Our faculty collaborate with arts organizations; we share guest artists and faculty; our students intern with arts organizations across the state; we offer broad opportunities for the public to participate in conferences, concerts, lectures, and exhibitions; we partner with K-12 to promote and strengthen experiences in the arts and humanities for elementary and secondary students across the state. Despite the quality and diversity of these programs, the whole remains less than the sum of its parts.

The broad range of independent University programs and absence of a central clearinghouse for activities aimed at K-12 education means that our programs are not reaching as many Minnesotans as they could. Arts and humanities outreach and public programming must be more visible and accessible to the public, and to K-12 educators and students. Through a more high-level understanding of the market for these activities, coordinated planning and marketing of our programming, and a new clearinghouse staffed to serve the information needs of K-12 schools, teachers and students, we will deepen and broaden our vital partnerships with communities across the state.

Prepared by Steven J. Rosenstone, Dean
College of Liberal Arts, Twin Cities Campus
July 15, 2004