

CHANGE AGENTS ON CAMPUS



JORDAN POPALIS



A student production of *Dead Man Walking* spawned new projects on the UNC campus.

Colleges and universities have been leading patrons of the arts for more than a century. Creative Campus grants reward their innovations and missions, and celebrate and assure the presence of high-quality arts in academic settings.

BY JOE NICKELL

Presenters and their funders always hope compelling artistic initiatives will saturate the cultural landscape, sprouting new perspectives and forging never-before-imagined connections. At the University of Iowa's Hancher Auditorium—recipient of a 2007 Creative Campus Innovations Program grant—the idea of a saturated cultural landscape took on new meaning this summer. The campus-based presenter (and seven others around the country) received the grant in early 2007 from the Association of Performing Arts Presenters to integrate arts activities with the greater academic environment on the UI campus.

Unfortunately, record rains and flooding swamped the facility in June, causing an estimated \$13 million in damages. The floods postponed many of the Hancher's activities that had been planned under the grant. For Hancher, that work still lies ahead.

At most campuses involved in the Creative Campus initiative, the seeds of change have found more stable (and less soggy) soil, resulting in cross-pollinations that have begun to flower in colorful new ways.

“This program has allowed presenters on campuses to position themselves as change agents, revolutionizing teaching and altering relationships between stakeholders in the arts and academics,” said Sandra Gibson, president and CEO of Arts Presenters. “We’re hoping to create a positive disruption on the campuses and signs so far indicate that we’re having success.”

In a nutshell, the Creative Campus initiative—funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation—aims to fuel a new paradigm for on-campus arts presenters, where programming is explicitly and deeply enmeshed in broader issues and activities in the academic community. Gibson said the program aims to propel risk-taking efforts that advance the notion of arts presenters as central players in community dialogue, identity and transformation.

“Campuses are a microcosm of what goes on in the rest of the world,” said Gibson. “We absolutely believe that the lessons that are being learned through this program have applicability to other, community-based presenters.”

Most of the Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program support activities continuing through May 2009. Here’s a run-down of progress on the eight campuses to date:

HANCHER AUDITORIUM

University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Directors of Iowa’s Hancher Auditorium say they’ve made adjustments in the wake of this past summer’s record floods, and plan to forge ahead with *The Eye Piece*, a multidisciplinary project involving staff at UI’s Center for Macular Degeneration, the Writing Program of the College of Medicine, the Theatre Arts Department, and faculty from the English, Psychology, and Physics departments.

Playwright Rinde Eckert, in collaboration with Ed Stone, a physician at CMD, is in the process of writing the story about a fictionalized painter grappling with losing his vision.

“The project was designed to explore how the world of health care and the arts have an enormous amount to say to each other and learn from each other,” said Judith Hurtig, artistic director at Hancher.

Because of the flood damage, the premiere of *The Eye Piece* has been pushed back two years, to January 2010.

“There’s so much investment in this project by so many people and departments that we didn’t want it to be moved to a makeshift location,” said Chuck Swanson, executive director of Hancher.



Ann Carlson’s *Green Movement*, about climate change, was commissioned for the Feet to the Fire Festival last May at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Dancers wear plastic coats full of U.S. currency and move slowly around a Holstein dairy cow.

CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.

The touchstone issue of global warming sparked *Feet to the Fire*, a two-year investigation of climate change issues through the lens of the arts.

Over the course of the 2008 spring semester, students at Wesleyan participated in a class taught by visiting dance professor Ann Carlson and biology professor Barry Chernoff. Students undertook field research at the Middletown Landfill, resulting in a series of movement and text works, which were performed at the first Feet to the Fire Festival on May 10. Carlson also premiered *Green Movement*, a commissioned dance piece, at the festival.

Building on those activities, Carlson and Chernoff will take a group of students to the rainforest of Guyana next spring; and Wesleyan has committed to make *Feet to the Fire* the First Year Matters program theme for all first-year students in the 2008-2009 academic year.

“This program has been hugely powerful as a means of having students be exposed to multiple pedagogies and to synthesize that experience through the arts,” said Pam Tatge, director of the Center for the Arts.



CAROLINA PERFORMING ARTS
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

It's all over and only just begun at UNC, where a one-year Creative Campus Initiative project (completed in the spring of 2008) has spawned a campus-wide plan to continue developing new, thematically challenging, multidisciplinary creative projects.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, the campus converged on the hot-button theme of *Criminal/Justice: the Death Penalty Examined*. Projects included a performance of Tim Robbins' adaptation of Sister Helen Prejean's bestseller *Dead Man Walking* as well as a staged reading of another Prejean book, *The Death of Innocents*; the premiere of a commissioned play, *Witness to an Execution*, by Mike Wiley; and numerous other performances, workshops, exhibits and lectures on the topic of the death penalty.

Through the project, "we became anchored in our own work and partnerships across campus, and less about top-down presentations," said Reed Colver, campus and community engagement coordinator at Carolina Performing Arts. "That's something I think will continue moving forward."

Indeed, having completed its work under the Arts Presentersgrant, Carolina Performing Arts is launching a self-styled Creative Campus project on gender and identity for the 2008-2009 academic year.

SUSIE NICHOLSON-DYKSTRA

HOPKINS CENTER
Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.

Audience demographics have always been an issue of study and, sometimes, concern for arts presenters. At the Hopkins Center, that focus has deepened through *Class Divide*, a far-reaching series of programs and workshops aimed at addressing class issues both at "the Hop" and in the broader culture.

"This was about trying to really figure out the barriers that we have [to attendance] out in the community while programming around an issue that has implications in our culture," said Margaret Lawrence, the Hop's director of programming.

Highlights of a busy 2007-2008 program included a solo theatrical performance by musician and storyteller Rik Reppe; screenings of 20 films on issues of class; themed musical performances by Old School Freight Train and Carolina Chocolate Drops; and a series of work-in-progress readings by playwright Anne Galjour, who in the coming year will premiere a new play based on field research conducted in Hanover and surrounding communities.

Though still a year from completion, *Class Divide* has influenced new activities both near and far. The Dean of Faculty recently committed funding to encourage faculty across campus to create new curriculum about class; and Galjour recently proposed a course on "writing from class" at San Francisco State University, where she teaches.

"I think this is just the beginning of some exciting new relationships," said Joseph Clifford, the Hop's outreach manager.



Following the performance in April of a work-in-progress about class issues, playwright Anne Galjour joined Dartmouth students for a reception. She also will premiere a play at the Hop in the next year.



Trumpeter Dave Douglas (above) will work with filmmaker Bill Morrison to develop a commissioned piece that combines the gadgetry of Silicon Valley and Stanford University's computer center, students and faculty.

STANFORD LIVELY ARTS

Stanford University, Stanford, Calif.

America is a culture of gadgeteers, and for that, we can thank Silicon Valley. That hub of technological innovation, in turn, can largely thank Stanford University—alma mater to the developers of more than 50 percent of the Valley's products.

So when Stanford Lively Arts looked for a creative project that would draw together diverse departments on campus, attention quickly turned to technology.

"Looking at the history of gadgets seemed like a perfect way to activate a sense of discovery and imagination around a core part of Stanford culture, and involve diverse constituents," said Jenny Bilfield, artistic and executive director at Stanford Lively Arts.

The project is only now getting under way. Trumpeter Dave Douglas and filmmaker Bill Morrison will visit the campus this semester, where they will begin to develop a commissioned piece drawing on resources from Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics as well as on students and faculty across campus. The piece will premiere in April 2010.

HOSTOS CENTER FOR THE ARTS & CULTURE

Hostos Community College—CUNY, Bronx, N.Y.

For years, Hostos Community College has sent students to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic for intensive cultural immersions and field research. Separately, the Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture has presented BomPlenazo, a biennial festival of Afro-Puerto Rican culture. As the Dominican community in New York City grew, the college began to consider hosting a Dominican culture festival as well.

"When I saw [the request for proposals for] this grant, a light went off: Let's link those programs together," said Wallace Edgecombe, director of the Center for the Arts & Culture. "The students who go abroad could do fieldwork in the communities that were featured in the festival, so that there was a deep on-campus engagement with the programming."

Turns out, that was easier said than done. All of the artists invited to participate in the inaugural Quijombó festival of Afro-Dominican culture, held October 2007, were denied their visas. Instead, a scaled-down festival featuring Dominican artists already living in the U.S. took place. A rescheduled festival in March also suffered the same fate.

"We're having to fight that at another level now, with the help from politicians," said Edgecombe.

The fate of the BomPlenazo festival seems more secure. Students performed field research in Loiza, Puerto Rico, this past summer, and the festival—featuring more than 60 guest artists—is scheduled for Oct. 6-12.

LIED CENTER OF KANSAS

University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan.

Insofar as the Creative Campus Innovations program is about branching out, the Lied Center of Kansas wins the award for taking the metaphor most literally. In the past year, the presenter has worked with professional artists and various campus departments to develop programming under the theme of *The Tree of Life*.

UK fine arts faculty are currently working with composer David Balakrishnan of Turtle Island String Quartet to develop an original music-and-dance performance (slated for April 2009) inspired by the topic of evolution, while campus-wide, workshops, colloquia and other activities have explored the cross-disciplinary dimensions of the topic.

"It's a really multi-layered project, but at the root of it is a case study for how our campus can come together to do research and teaching in a truly multidisciplinary way," said Karen Christilles, associate director at the Lied Center.

Roots, branches, trees: In Kansas, all are growing nicely.



Dancer Rob Clark was part of a multimedia exploration of themes developed through interviews with rehab patients for *Loop Diver* at the Lied Center for the Performing Arts in Nebraska.

**LIED CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb.**

The technology that brought us a lifelike Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy sits at the heart of a program to help rehabilitate victims of catastrophic injuries through art—or, specifically, through Artistic Rehabilitation Therapy, A.R.T.—a motion-tracking software tool developed to give patients at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital a sense of creativity as they work to recover from injury. Cameras track the movements of patients and process that into feedback that gives a sense of creative collaboration.

“The hope is that rehabilitation patients will see

greater, faster progress because they’re intrigued with the creative potential of the application and therefore have something to take their minds off the pain and repetitiveness of rehab,” said Laura Kendall, assistant director of community engagement at the Lied Center.

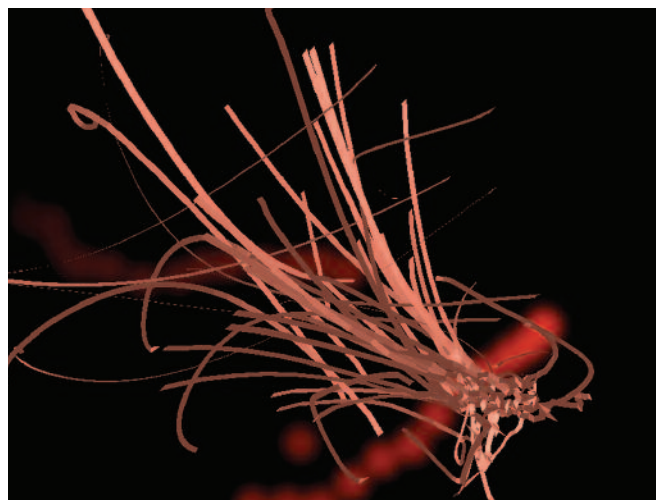
In the coming year, internationally respected dance troupe Troika Ranch will develop and premiere *Loop Diver*, a multimedia exploration of themes of violence developed through interviews and observations of rehab patients, as well as Troika’s own interactions with A.R.T.

“This has opened everyone’s eyes about how the research and development process is the same in science and the arts,” said Kendall. **PA**

MICHAEL AMSLER, OSCAR SOL, DAWN STOPPIELLO



Turtle Island String Quartet’s David Balakrishnan (second from left) is composing a full length multi-genre piece about social issues explored in *The Tree of Life* at Lied Center of Kansas.



A motion tracking software tool helped create projections for a work about violence at the Lied Center for the Performing Arts in Nebraska.