

White Paper from AHUM ad hoc committee on Academic Futures

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Preamble

The Arts and Humanities have long been foundational to a liberal arts education, and they must remain at the center of the university's research and teaching missions as those missions evolve.

The Arts and Humanities study, document, and give voice to the human experience in all of its diversity. They engage with the continuing significance of our past, its competing civilizations, and its constant drive to engage and understand human experience in art, culture, and thought. Equally importantly, the Arts and Humanities speak to and envision the contemporary world in which our futures are being written, visualized, and performed.

More and more, the Arts and Humanities advance ways of knowing the world that cannot be compartmentalized or reduced to singular disciplinary perspectives or foundations. In this respect, the Arts and Humanities offer students the freedom and space to confront the issues of today and how they are embedded in our histories, to examine these issues without prejudice, and to evaluate them for the complexity of human experience they contain.

Our place in the University

The Arts and Humanities have long been proud to take their place alongside our colleagues in the Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences. We believe that the breadth of intellectual and artistic production undertaken by the Arts and Humanities places us at the intersection of many fields of knowledge and creativity that are central to the university's vision of its future. Our increasingly intersectional research and teaching positions the Arts and Humanities as a division uniquely equipped to address and create a future that is defining the production of knowledge more and more as a multi-disciplinary task.

Interdisciplinarity

At its best and most effective, Interdisciplinarity is a frictive space where disciplines are allowed to intersect and challenge one another without losing their identity. This requires the development of a curriculum that advances the intersections already present across the Arts and Humanities but which needs increased infrastructure and incentive: curriculum management is still too discipline-based and discourages the development of innovative, intersectional program of study. We offer programs of study that take up questions of knowledge and ways of knowing (linguistic, visual, and performative, of history and its forms (from fictional to non-fictional), and of reality as it is refracted through traditional and emerging technologies of communication (text, film, digital media). All of these subjects and methods of study are already practiced within our existing units and disciplines. What is needed is the economic, curricular, and visionary support to transform them into programs of study that build upon and extend our current disciplinary structure.

Recommendations

We have organized our recommendations according to fundamental approaches and to the media that define the Arts and Humanities:

Historical Studies

Historical approaches, which consider and value the diversity of human experience across time and place, are essential to the Arts and Humanities. Historical inquiry involves certain habits of mind. Historians and historically-minded artists and humanists practice empathy for historical actors by qualitatively examining the source materials that they have produced, whether they be artifacts, oral traditions, written materials, or other forms of expression. We construct and critically examine narratives of change over time, fashioning interpretations from multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives to understand how our present condition has been ineluctably shaped by the past. We value complexity, contingency, context, and the provisional nature of knowledge, and we have deep respect for the importance of interpretive debate. Finally, we use our understanding of the past to engage ethically with the present, insisting that collective memory and the historical narratives that inform our senses of citizenship be true to the facts.

While the discipline of History has been critical to defining these habits of mind, historical inquiry crosses disciplinary boundaries and offers remarkable opportunities for problem-based interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and research – not just within the Arts and Humanities but across the entire CU campus. CU's new Center for the Study of Origins is one example of an interdisciplinary endeavor focused on historical questions. We encourage additional transdisciplinary conversations, research programs, and teaching opportunities on topics and problems that have change over time at their core, and we firmly believe that the historical habits of mind that characterize the Arts and Humanities will only enrich these inquiries.

Creative Work and Performance

Creative work increases our capacity to engage with the complexity of the contemporary world—its technology, geo-politics, aesthetics, ethics, etc.—while forming and revealing the conceptual links between differing perspectives within that world. These skills and capacities are needed now more than ever. They are forged in studios that research and practice intellectual risk-taking, experimentation, form-bending, interdisciplinarity, and social engagement. These skills and practices not only generate meaningful art works and performances but also fosters resilient and creative individuals who can problem solve, think critically, team build, and bring innovation to a multitude of contexts and professions.

Art engages world events and continually adapts new technologies, tying them to individual experience and expression. Art links us to our humanity (both past and future), it participates in the world, and keeps us mindful of our human connectedness. Consider how *Hamilton*, the musical has sparked interest in US history among high school students; how Jacob Riis's photos improved tenement housing in NYC; how the Leningrad Symphony, by regularly playing during its siege, bolstered the city's ability to survive; and how *Voguing* created a non-violent space of resistance for queer, Latino men. Art functions as a catalyst; it magnifies, interrogates, and dissects our reality; it provides understanding, hope, and evolution; it "starts fires."

To affirm the importance of the Arts three things should be noted:

- arts and cultural production contributes \$704.2 billion to the U.S. economy each year
- human life is unimaginable without arts and their ability to allow us to see and address the questions and issues generated by our past and our present.
- The most prestigious STEM universities in the U.S. have added art curriculum and programs in recognition how vital the expressive and critical practices of the Arts and Humanities are alongside a STEM focused education.

The campus should establish an integrated, centralized approach to the arts on campus. The current approach does not allow the strength of the arts on campus to reach the breadth of audience, economically, geographically and socially, that it deserves. The campus should create a comprehensive performing arts center.

Languages and Cultures

Language is the principal means of expressing thought as well as understanding our own culture and that of others. Learning foreign languages is central to educating the global citizens our world needs. The academic identity of the literature and culture part of so-called “language departments” must be recognized to avert any tendencies to redefine these departments as auxiliary units that primarily teach foreign languages as a skill, rather than as the basis that affords students a rich understanding of foreign cultures in their full complexity and historical depth. Likewise, it remains important that language instruction as well as research and teaching of foreign cultures remains connected in the same units. CLAC (Teaching of Cultures and Languages across the Curriculum) components in departments teaching any subject concerning the non-English speaking world should be strengthened. This will create positive side-effects for an increasing number of foreign students, who need help not just in their English proficiency but also in mastering US academic standards. Tenure track for the best language instructors is desirable, as is the removal of bureaucratic barriers (e.g. overload regulations) for exploring innovations in teaching. At the same time, the campus needs to create a coherent plan to advance the continuing significance of the foreign language departments as the preeminent intersection for the history, literature, and art, of those nations, regions, and continents that have shaped, currently shape, and will in future shape the world for which our graduates need to be prepared.

Literary Study

Language may be the most crucial of all human forms of expression but literature is the form in which language is given its most far reaching examination as the medium in which we create meaning in the world. Reading novels, poems, plays, and stories, and the act of writing itself (creative, critical, and non-literary) engage with the multiple and complex ways in which meaning arises from a rich manipulation of form, plot and character, metaphor, hyperbole, and allusion. An area that can be fruitfully developed by the literature teaching departments on campus—in addition to the interdisciplinary approach many already pursue—is the multiplicity and complexity of these interlocking elements across changing historical, cultural and national contexts. Many of the periods that define literary study have a transnational basis. For example, the Mediterranean world in antiquity and the middle ages was defined by the interaction of many nations and cultures; in the twentieth-century, modernism spread far beyond its European roots and was itself transformed by migration through different continents and cultures. Degree options that configure the study of literature in these and other similar concentrations would augment the vitality and significance of literature to students whose understanding of the world and its cultures demands multiple perspectives delivered in an integrated way.

Visual Media and Visual Literacy

In the Arts and Humanities, the critical study of film and other media is essential, particularly in a contemporary landscape saturated with visual imagery, the perceived democratization of production practices, and the multiplication of spectatorship platforms that are taking the place of historical viewing and consumption customs. Cinema, media, television, and streaming products are reflections—in both senses of the word—of the society, culture, time, and context from which they emerge and in which they are consumed. In our era of ubiquitous media and visual images, of constant visual stimulation/distractions, we must operate from the perspective that responsible, informed and critical media and visual literacy today is an essential academic and social obligation. Understanding the history, form, context, form, and meaning of films, television, documentary, installation, and visual and performance arts is an intellectual, and social imperative for the creation, expansion, and sustainment of a responsible citizenry. The University must be at the forefront of a new era of forward critical thinking about cinema, television, and all visual media.

The study of art and art history is committed to the practice, production, critical and historical study of art within a liberal arts education that encourages experimentation and independence of thought. Our faculty offers a rigorous curriculum that crosses disciplines and attracts inquisitive, dedicated students with wide-ranging interests, encouraging creative investigation as an essential skill informed by the highest standards of critical thought. Our diverse faculty, students, and staff within the arts are committed to ongoing engagement with communities locally and globally. To further these goals, we recommend: designating the CU Art Museum as a campus (not a college) resource; creating a “Makers Space” comparable to the Idea Forge in Engineering, but open to all; and integrate all the arts and humanities activities across the campus.

Philosophical and Critical Study

Philosophy is organized around a stable set of foundational core disciplines—epistemology, metaphysics, ethics/values, deductive and inductive logic. Within its core, philosophy addresses the most central question about human existence: What is knowledge? What are facts? What is the nature of human beings and what defines personhood? What’s the foundation of right and wrong? Within the area of applied ethics, philosophy offers courses that address a wide range of contemporary issues: abortion, the treatment of animals, health care, poverty and economic justice. Through the discipline of logic, philosophy offers education on the nature of reasoning: What’s the difference between good and bad arguments? What does it take to establish a conclusion or confirm a hypothesis? This core provides rich opportunities for interdisciplinary work that connects philosophy with many other areas of inquiry. Philosophy can contribute to interdisciplinary collaboration and program development in several ways: with the Arts through courses on aesthetics, with Asian Languages and Civilizations through courses on Asian Philosophy (Confucianism), with Classics through courses on ancient philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), with English through courses on the nature and philosophy of literature, with History through courses on theories about the nature and driving forces of history (Marxism, political philosophy), and with languages such as French and German through its history of philosophy courses (Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche). Philosophy also connects with disciplines in the natural and social sciences: With Physics: What are space and time? What’s a law of nature? With Mathematics: What are numbers? Do abstract mathematical objects exist? Are mathematical truths discovered or invented? With Biology: What is a species? What’s the role of rationality in the process of evolution? With Psychology and Cognitive Science: What’s the nature of the human mind? What are the right methods for investigating the mind?

Integrated Programs of Study

The development of such programs would give interdisciplinarity a coherent, academic goal. In the Arts and Humanities interdisciplinarity is no longer an adjunct but a practice that has transformed the work of different generations of scholars and artists. It is time to do more than acknowledge this strength and how it runs parallel to the multi-disciplinary experience which informs the academic expectations of many contemporary students as well as the world of work into which they will graduate. We recommend that the university should explore capitalizing on the disciplinary organization of the AHUM division as a base to develop integrated majors that prepare students for a world that now makes very different professional demands. For example: integrated majors that cover the history, culture, politics areas of each of the world's major areas or of an historical era. Each of these new integrated majors can be created through existing disciplines and should exist alongside the majors within those disciplines. Such majors can also be interdepartmental with the details of their administration worked out by the participating departments, etc. To promote this development of majors related to but not framed solely by inherited disciplinary fields, the campus needs to address the administrative and budget limitations that restrain the development of new degree programs. A more flexible approach to majors and the ability of academic units to manage and sustain such programs of study is needed. It is important that these are developed as majors because of the added visibility this provides for recruitment to the university as well as to the majors themselves.