

ARTS AT SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY

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Rare is the day at Santa Clara when there is no “art” happening. Art exhibitions, music and dance concerts, creative writing projects, and theatre productions issue from the near constant collaborations among students, faculty and staff committed to artistic expression and exploration. Further, the arts community at Santa Clara links artistic presentation with substantial reflection on the history, theory, and cultural significance of such presentation in the manner of exhibition catalogues, conference papers, and scholarly publications. Any reflection on the renewal of the arts at Santa Clara in the coming years must begin by acknowledging the quantity and quality of artistic activity that already enriches the campus and local community.¹ In an educational market wherein the “Jesuit tradition of the arts” is oft-invoked for the sake of more impressive public relations literature, Santa Clara has made some significant progress in demonstrating that such a tradition must be sustained by concrete commitments of talent (students, faculty, staff) and resources (space, time, funds, curricular standing). As these commitments have not always been thoroughgoing, and as *stasis* remains antithetical to the artistic impulse, this paper aims to recognize the ways in which the arts might grow and develop in distinctive ways related to Santa Clara’s mission as a university in the Catholic and Jesuit traditions.

How should the arts be envisioned for the renewal of a Santa Clara education?

1. In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Steven J. Tepper, associate director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University, notes that “creativity has become the sine qua non of a successful America. Nurturing it is seen as an important public good, not only benefiting individuals, but contributing to the economic health and well-being of the country at large.”² Tepper goes on to examine the ways in which we might assess “the context or climate for creativity” on university campuses; he concludes that “a reasonable place to begin might be to collect information about the level of arts activities taking place on those campuses.” If, as Tepper’s research suggests, truly creative work thrives in environments characterized by (among other things)³ collaboration, cross-cultural exchange, and interdisciplinary exploration, then a renewal of a Santa Clara education must involve a vigorous recommitment to the arts precisely because they (1) provide the larger community with a concrete model for

¹ The following websites may prove helpful in familiarizing the reader with the specifics of these artistic activities: <http://www.scu.edu/cpa/>, <http://www.scu.edu/deSaisset/>, <http://www.scu.edu/english/programs/creativewriting.html>, <http://www.scu.edu/art/>.

² Steven J. Tepper, “The Creative Campus: Who’s No. 1?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1 October 2004): B6-B8. Tepper defines “creativity” broadly, as reflecting “those activities that involve the application of intellectual energies to the production of new ways of solving problems (as in science and mathematics) or of expressing ideas (as in art). Creativity is not simply about self-expression. It is about producing something new (or combining old elements in new ways) to advance a particular field or add to the storehouse of knowledge.” (B6-B7) I am grateful to Diane Jonte-Pace, Assistant Vice-Provost for Faculty Development, for calling my attention to this article.

³ These “other things” are (1) time and resources and (2) tolerance of failure—not insignificant realities in the environment at Santa Clara.

creative engagement and (2) generate and sustain an atmosphere of creativity within the University.⁴

2. Tepper's observations prove compelling for any institution of higher education; hence, Santa Clara University rightly considers monitoring and improving the creative climate because such follows from its nature as, first and foremost, a university. At the same time, as a "Catholic" and "Jesuit" university, Santa Clara's creativity is marked by a particular "way of proceeding" that involves, among other things, (a) humanistic education in the service of the common good, (b) genuine solidarity with those most in need, (c) engagement with questions of ultimate meaning, and (d) the cultivation of creative tensions.⁵ In a renewed Santa Clara education, the arts would function not only as barometers of the creative climate or as models of creative expression and exploration but also as fundamentally integrative activities that, in both form and content, advance the distinctive "way of proceeding" embraced by the University.
 - a. The arts address the education of the whole person, engaging and exercising all the human faculties: intellect, body, imagination, affect, emotion, spirit, will. They foster a self-expression that grows increasingly purposeful and disciplined. Further, historical study of the arts inevitably demands that students encounter the most complex of products produced by human beings. The arts invite students to experience the deeper places of their own humanity and challenge them to discover the humanity of others as it is expressed in poetry, drama, sculpture, architecture, painting, music, etc.
 - b. No citizen of our rapidly globalizing world can afford to be without at least a basic understanding of the matrix of other cultures in which their own is embedded. The increasingly rapid clash and hybridization of cultures can most easily be seen and understood through the arts. For example, French looting of artifacts from the Near East, Asia and Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in the cultural appropriation of these artifacts and the stereotyping present in the art of Delacroix, Matisse, Picasso. At the same time, in a more positive vein, new forms of expression are born from these encounters, like the Chicano theatre movement and hip-hop art, music and dance. The arts at Santa Clara might be seen as portals by which we come to encounter and understand human communities and thereby grow in genuine solidarity, particularly with those whose stories need be told and heard. Technical excellence cannot be the sole benchmark of any present or future artistic notoriety of this university; rather our artistic distinctiveness needs be located in our educating students to develop an ever more expansive vision of the world and to participate as fully as possible in its ongoing life.⁶

⁴ At SCU there are clear indications of the arts' potential to model consistent collaboration (e.g., any theatre, music, or dance production in which students, faculty and staff of differing expertise work together to create an artistic event), cross-cultural exchange (e.g., the work of the DeSaisset Museum in presenting the work of artists like Hisako Hibi in conjunction with the work of theatre voice students reading first-person accounts of Japanese-American internment), and interdisciplinary engagement (e.g., a new lab science course entitled the Physics of Dance taught by a professor of dance and a professor of physics). These activities point to future possibilities for increasing the creative climate at Santa Clara University.

⁵ See Mark Ravizza, SJ, "The Mission of Santa Clara as a Catholic, Jesuit University in a Globalizing World"

⁶ This movement to participation is, according to Bernard Lonergan, proper to the symbolic nature of art: "[Art] is an expression of the human spirit outside the limits of adequate intellectual formulation or appraisal. It seeks to

- c. From their beginnings the visual and performing arts have been implicated in the human search for and encounter with “God” and/or ultimate meaning. From the musical fragments of the *Hymn to Apollo* to the professions of faith in Palestrina masses and Bach cantatas, from the skepticism of Euripides to the anxieties of Marlowe, from the Islamic drama of 18th century Iran to the Yüan drama of 13th century China, the arts engage questions about human and transcendent meaning. Rarely confined by their “confessional” contexts, the arts express, provoke, trouble, affirm ultimate questions that cannot be answered simply, once and for all.
 - d. In a world, nation, and academy where conversations regarding “things that really matter” can too often stall with polarizing position statements, the arts provide a valuable resource for the university and larger community to grow in the ability (a) to enter into genuine dialogue and (b) to deal creatively with very real tensions and divisions. The arts provide the Catholic Jesuit university with an antidote to the fundamentalism (of so many stripes) that burdens society with an unwillingness to wrestle with the ambiguities that are part of the search for the common good and ultimate meaning. The fact of the matter is that one person’s experience of an art object is always (even if slightly) different from another’s. One person’s interpretation/appropriation does not exhaust the work’s meaningfulness. The arts offer the university opportunities to create a community of shared meaning by providing both the experience and the necessary reflection on the experience. And, as they often rely on the establishment of creative tensions for their dynamism, the arts encourage an experience of the world that values the preservation of tensions rather than their annihilation.⁷
3. In considering the renewal of a Santa Clara education, the arts emerge as fundamentally creative disciplines that function integrally within the university community by providing sites for inter- and cross-disciplinary encounters.⁸ While there have been several ventures made in this regard (e.g., collaborations among faculty and students from English, Religious Studies, and Music in studying the Holocaust; interactions among faculty from Political Science, Art History, and Theatre around the East-West issues foregrounded by the play *Pentecost*), the potential for further development remains clear. To this end, the arts need be seen and promoted by the university and its constituencies as central to the educational enterprise. Though Santa Clara has made significant steps

mean, to convey, to impart something that is to be reached not through science or philosophy but through a participation.”

⁷ A concrete example might be found in the recent production of *Dead Man Walking* by Tim Robbins (and based on the book by Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ). Presented by the Department of Theatre and Dance and the School of Law, *Dead Man Walking* provided the opportunity for the community to experience the art object and subsequently engage in conversation about the issue of capital punishment in the United States. Importantly, the play’s power derives from its resolute refusal to make the issue “easy”; it generates a deep sympathy for the murder victims and their families and does not sentimentalize the condemned murderer. The complexities and ambiguities drawn to the surface by the play assist rather than hinder the subsequent process of reflection.

⁸ These encounters can be enhanced by, for example, by investing resources in faculty with the interest and expertise to make connections with other areas of the university as well as the local community. The issue of replacing older faculty and hiring new faculty in order to deal with developments in the discipline and increased interest in the arts on the part of students will, at some point, need to be discussed thoroughly particularly with regard to certain of the arts departments.

toward undermining the notion that the arts are essentially extra-curricular activities, the challenge of moving the arts from the periphery to the center of university life remains in process. Possibilities for growth in this regard include: (a) increasing the visibility of arts events on and off campus, using these events to build the reputation of the university, and (b) providing more adequate space for the Department of Art and Art History, possibly relocating it closer to the CPA so as to facilitate more possibilities for creative synergies.⁹

4. The arts at Santa Clara are exemplary in supporting the teaching-scholar model that is so important to the University's self-understanding. Exhibition-based scholarship in the Department of Art and Art History and performance/production in the departments that comprise the Center of Performing Arts join faculty and students in close (often interdisciplinary) collaborations that involve hands-on learning and the real dissemination of new knowledge to the wider community. The De Saisset Museum's education area has ample record of the real scholarship undertaken by faculty and students and shared with the public. The Center of Performing Arts consistently presents the fruit of collaborative creation among faculty and student directors, designers, actors, musicians and dancers in plays, dances, concerts, etc.

How should the arts, within the context of all the other themes and areas, be revised to “renew” the curriculum for both graduate and undergraduate students?

1. Collectively, the arts at Santa Clara University have the potential to engage in their own distinctive ways all of the overarching themes recently identified as central to a Santa Clara education. While it should be understood that the arts do not derive their ultimate value from their usefulness in exploring these (or any other) themes; the arts—valuable in their own right—could indeed make a significant contribution to the creative atmosphere within which these themes are institutionally considered. In theory and in practice, the arts might grow in engaging these themes more explicitly and regularly in courses, performances, exhibitions, creative/scholarly projects. Some examples might prove helpful:
 - a. International Education: Engagement with the arts of other nations often takes the direct form of immersion in the other culture, whether through a short trip (e.g., summer immersion in El Salvador) or an entire semester/year spent abroad (e.g., Italy, England, Spain, Ghana). Such experience necessarily entails an extended engagement with the physical environment that has formed and continues to shape the culture (inclusive of its economy, religion, social institutions, and art). Students who are well-versed in ways of doing and/or approaching art, when they are so immersed, may find in any of the culture's arts a privileged access point into its presiding concerns, needs, values, etc. To familiarize students with the arts in global forms is among the most direct methods of promoting understanding among the world's peoples. At the same time, it would be important to

⁹ One of the reflectors from the Department of Art and Art History commented: “...we have outgrown our current warehouse home. We occupy the most outdated and ugly building on campus, and the overcrowding of faculty offices has begun to affect morale. The building has many problems that are well-documented. The department needs a new and more efficient space that is well-planned and suited to our needs as well as future growth. The demand for our classes far exceeds our ability to offer them, especially in the technology area.”

understand that not all world populations enjoy the “luxury” of art to the same extent.

- b. Civic Learning: An increased emphasis on the cultural study and practice of the arts contributes to a more knowing civic engagement. In addition to so much else, the arts pursue, manifest, consolidate and/or contest social, economic and political power. Artists might support the status quo or might be ostracized from it; in either case they assert that “attention must be paid” to the contexts within which human beings aim to live their lives as individuals and as communities.
- c. Ecological Sustainability: For the sake of demonstrating the ways in which the arts at Santa Clara might be encouraged to enter the conversations regarding even seemingly distant themes like the environment, consider the following information from a recent Call for Papers. The panel entitled “Greening the Theatre II: Implications for Nature on Stage” invites contributions on topics that could just as easily be treated at SCU from the perspective of theatre, dance, literature or visual art: “representation of the effects of technology on people or the land; cultural narratives that sanction human exploitation of the land; intersections of social justice and ecological issues on stage; intersections of ecocriticism and performance studies; the body as a site of intersection between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’; the ecologies of theatrical space; animal representation on stage.”¹⁰
- d. Ethics and Justice: There are numerous ways in which ethical issues and questions of justice surface within the arts. Artworks themselves can explicitly engage these issues: e.g., David Popalisky’s recent *Barred From Life*, a performance piece undertaken in collaboration with the Innocence Project and the SCU School of Law, about wrongful conviction and the miscarriage of justice; the current exhibition of Hisako Hibi at the De Saisset Museum coupled with performed readings from Japanese-American internment testimonies. At the same time, questions of ethics and justice can be engaged in the analytical stages of arts education: Who has access to “art”? What are the means of its production and dissemination? Why are some artists supported by funding agencies and others not? What is the role of art in educating the ethical imagination?
- e. Diversity: If, as Tepper suggests, creativity flourishes with diversity, then the arts—traditionally a safe-space for people easily marginalized by dominant culture—have a particularly important role to play in the journey toward inclusive excellence. Not only do the arts expose students, faculty, and staff to the experiences of what might be perceived as “other,” but they educate us to understand that, finally, we are incomplete without the “other.” The consistent popularity of the Music at Noon series demonstrates that when people learn about world music, they crave more and more experience of it; further, they establish some sort of connection with those who generate(d) the music. Students participating in the arts come to appreciate difference; hence, they have earned the reputation of being, for the most part, understanding, accepting, tolerant. We do

¹⁰ Call for Papers, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment Annual Conference June 21-25, 2005 at University of Oregon, Eugene. <http://www.asle.umn.edu/>

what we can to increase diversity on all levels; however, if we are to avoid creative stagnation we must commit more energetically to the diversification of our arts community.

- f. Theology and Culture: Not only do courses in the arts regularly and explicitly engage issues of theology and cultures, but the arts on campus regularly provide artistic reflection on these realities. The De Saisset exhibit on Rouault, the upcoming CPA presentation of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen*, the millennial symposium on the 10th century playwright Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, the recent production of Tim Robbins' *Dead Man Walking*—each of these events has/will explore issues of theology and culture from a particularly artistic vantage point.

As with all things, resources of time, funding and personnel will be important in maximizing what could be some very exciting opportunities.

2. Arts students at Santa Clara have an impressive record of creative accomplishment—in art history, studio art, creative writing, dance, music, and theatre. Though these students also engage in scholarship regarding the place of the arts in history and contemporary society, the arts programs might grow in providing the campus (students as well as faculty and staff) with an even more thoroughgoing study of the arts in relationship to culture, that is the welter of political, religious, economic, social, legal, linguistic, environmental phenomena that comes to define life in particular communities.
3. Because the arts have a very longstanding and revered place in Catholic Jesuit education, and because Santa Clara seeks to grow in “national distinction as a Catholic Jesuit university,” it makes eminent sense to build upon the artistic traditions that are already part of this university's heritage. Santa Clara, because of the students, faculty and staff engaged in the practice and study of the arts, is well-placed to become a center of distinguished artistic activity and creative reflection—a center on the model of the other university Centers of Distinction that might serve other colleges and universities by exploring (from our unique perspective) the role of the arts in the 21st century. By strengthening the arts and leveraging effectively their educational benefits, SCU could provide a valuable resource to students (many of whom have been deprived of arts education because of budget reductions in public school systems), faculty and staff (many of whom remain unaware of the depth and breadth of the Jesuit educational commitment to the fine and performing arts), and members of the local community (many of whom might not have regular access to arts events).

Reflectors

Hans Boepple, Robert Bozina, Kelly Detweiler, Barbara Fraser, Teresa McCollough,
Andrea Pappas, Nancy Wait-Kromm

Addendum

Reflectors Additional Remarks

Department of Art and Art History

1. Faculty with national and international recognition and exhibits. I feel we have the strongest professional group of artists/teachers in the entire Jesuit system.
2. Alumni working in the field and many in impressive positions such as computer animation for Industrial Light and Magic and the storyboard drawers for the movie industry. Many graduates are finishing graduate school and joining the profession as artists and teachers.
3. We have an unusually high degree of success for alumni wishing to enter graduate study. Recent grads from the Chicago Art Institute, New York Figurative School, American University, Pratt.
4. Our recent growth in majors has made us a medium sized department worthy of additional resources.
5. The arts have the largest range of norms regarding evaluation of faculty scholarship. We need to acknowledge these norms in the evaluations for tenure and promotion. Additionally, we need to acknowledge that there are new media arts for which the norms are only slowly emerging.
6. Curating artistic exhibitions is a scholarly work; the catalogue is often the only access people have to the art works.
7. The demand for our classes has outstripped what we can offer—especially in the non-Western area (where we currently have only one class, an embarrassment to the University) and history of photography. We regularly turn away non-majors from our courses because we cannot offer enough of them. This impoverishes the entire community, particularly those students whose public school educations did not include the arts.
8. In spite of the many handicaps (the building and staffing being primary among them), the faculty and students achieve a high degree of success. If we can do all of this in the face of the institutional and physical barriers we currently confront, we can only look forward with enthusiasm and joy to the day we become part of a center of distinction for the arts at SCU. Such a development would truly place our arts programs in a position of national prominence.

Music

1. Well-established concert series, Music at Noon, interactive classes, festivals, opera, orchestra, choirs
2. Faculty has active performers; dedicated to technology and student learning
3. Facility in music is limited in terms of practice spaces and storage (given the growth of interest and activity)