Anthony J. Kolenic, Ph.D.
ArtsEngine & a2ru Interim Executive Director

University of Michigan | 1400 Duderstadt Center   akolenic@umich.edu
2281 Bonisteel Boulevard | Ann Arbor, MI 48109   Phone: 734.763.8932

ALLIANCE FOR THE ARTS IN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Executive Summary: Students Perspectives of Arts-Integrative Interdisciplinary Efforts on a2ru University Campuses

Thank you for your continued participation in the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru). a2ru is committed to providing a number of benefits for its partner institutions—one of which is access to new research that has the capacity to help shape and influence decision-making concerning arts-integrative interdisciplinary efforts and initiatives on partner campuses.

This white paper—*Perspectives on Arts-Integrative Interdisciplinary Training: Student Views and Experiences on a2ru University Campuses*—aims to provide leadership at a2ru partner institutions an aggregate view of student perspectives on the value of interdisciplinary training, student reactions to efforts and opportunities underway on their home campuses, needs currently unmet, and challenges students face and experience within that context. Information for this white paper was collected through several different formats during and after the a2ru *Emerging Creatives* Student Conference held January 30 through February 1, 2014 at Stanford University.

Summary of Findings:

- Students overwhelmingly linked arts-integrative interdisciplinarity and open-mindedness, identifying this type of training and their expectation of access to it as a generational shift.

- They desire and *expect* these opportunities to be easily accessible and visible on campus. Many students lamented that their involvement in interdisciplinary endeavors had been "accidental" rather than purposefully built into their educational experience.

- These students place a high value on collaboration, and want to add "layers of experience" based on their individual interests and disciplinary expertise onto a particular project or problem. In general, they are less interested in changing or destroying the boundaries of a particular discipline, but rather want to find ways to work more collaboratively, based on a foundation of mutual respect.

- Campus culture was routinely discussed; students are suspicious of inauthenticity, and overwhelmingly strive for sincere and committed efforts from their institutions. They are surprisingly aware of the relationships between funding, space, and common practices regarding tenure and promotion.

- They realize that they need disciplinary training and deep expertise, and that trying to learn "everything" can cause too little focus and be ineffective; however, the stringent curricular requirements of a particular major or school to which many students are subject was strongly identified as a challenge and limiting factor to their preferred level of interdisciplinary engagement.

- Much like faculty and administrators' experiences, disciplinary vernaculars—the language and meanings endemic to particular fields—also create discord and miscommunications among students.

- More than anything, interdisciplinary students identified a need for community among students, faculty, administrators and employers. Those who do not find it on campus look outside of the institution—through jobs or internships, for example—to gain interdisciplinary skills and make connections.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Develop means of valuing the impact of arts-integrative interdisciplinary faculty production/activity that sit within and across institutionally-normative disciplinary impact markers. Such a shift would demonstrate investment to students and allow faculty members to be rewarded for these efforts that are more in line with the fuller range of twenty-first century forms of scholarly and creative production.

- Offer an increased amount of specifically collaborative and interdisciplinary courses—particularly with and through the arts—that require many fields, including non-majors, and teach toward collaborative creativity and interdisciplinary skills.

- Provide well-publicized, formal and informal, and highly accessible venues and facilities. Particularly those that exist outside of the jurisdiction of any particular college.

- Retool the relationship between curricula and traditional time structures like semesters to allow for the length and depth of iterative creation and learning, which often does not adhere to 16-week cycles. This could take several forms, including two-semester sequences and others.

- Develop partnerships with bodies outside of the university that employ collaborative and interdisciplinary skills. Relationships between the university, its students, and these bodies provide multifaceted training and increased continuity between their education and the "real world."

Should you like to speak further about any of the findings described in this summary or in the paper please feel free to contact me or the co-author, Lauren Fretz Thompson, at akolenic@umich.edu or lfretz@umich.edu, respectively. I thank you again for your continued commitment to the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities.

Anthony J. Kolenic, Ph.D.
University of Michigan
Interim Executive Director
Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities
ArtsEngine