

BYOI Proposal: The Role of Arts Practice in the Research University

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Description of Topic:

By its very nature, the research university contains a diverse set of departments, disciplines and specializations. Academic units - including the arts - follow certain patterns and arrangements. However, in the same way that there has been a unity of the biological sciences in recent years, the vertical structure of the research institution has gradually become more horizontal and borders between the disciplines, increasingly porous, resulting in a kind of convergence of disciplines. Regardless of whether the structure resembles collapsed or indistinct territories or a “tinker toy” arrangement, the value and nature of exchange between arts practice and other historically divided areas can be interpreted in a variety of ways from various disciplinary perspectives. Accordingly, visual artists, performance artists, sound artists, theater artists, translators, creative writers, and scholars of the arts collaborate and produce unique work that cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Scholars and practitioners alike reflect on two distinct aspects of artmaking and creative inquiry that involve: 1) research: original creative work produced through some form of studio or post-studio practice in collaboration with high-level research activity on the one hand, and: 2) the integration of arts practice across disciplines in the research university on the other. Numerous models and case studies exist for such collaborations and some claim that arts practice itself provides the ideal connective tissue to bridge disciplines. However, many of these focus on the applied arts, or instrumentalize art as a means to enhance creativity and innovation within a particular discipline (for example: the application of design thinking and/or data visualization for modeling public health). Research institutions are adept at engaging the unique qualities of creative practice to support the development of creative, analytic, and adaptive thinking, qualities that are considered by many to be a key to success. However, in many instances, the case for creative inquiry and art practice itself, which has its own intrinsic value, unique set of properties, and means of producing knowledge is lost in the process. There is a growing concern in many research institutions that if we can neither understand nor articulate the intrinsic value of the arts in the research university, we run the risk that arts practice and research could become isolated from the rest of the university.

Importance of Topic at Washington University:

Addressing this problem at Washington University would enhance the culture for arts practice on campus and also reinforce the university’s commitment to leading discussions on issues that impact higher education – specifically, arts practice education - moving forward. Through the

formation of a BYOI group that is modeled after the Mellon Foundation funded vertical seminar: *The Role of Arts Practice in the Research University*, which I taught last fall, participants could convene on a regular bases and solidify a plan to produce a book with contributions by faculty on campus and various distinguished authorities in the field. The BYOI group would be comprised of the core group of faculty from across schools who participated in the seminar, in addition to other faculty who attended periodically based on their respective interests. The BYOI group would also align with the mission of the seminar, which sought to articulate the role of art-making and creative practice in research institutions and clarify the specific implications of such on faculty research, teaching and service at Washington University. The BYOI group would also look at the University of Michigan based *ArtsEngine* initiative, which has since developed into The Alliance for the Arts in Research Institutions, or a2ru. As indicated by their mission statement, a2ru generates knowledge, advocacy, and resources that enable universities to support and integrate artists and arts practices across campus. Over twenty, tier-one research universities including Washington University are founding sponsors of a2ru. The BYOI would pick up the course of the conversations that have emerged nationally through a2ru and connect our institution in a robust way to other a2ru partner institutions across the US.

List of BYOI Faculty:

Below is a list of faculty and one Ph.D student who have committed to participating in the BYOI group: *The Role of Arts Practice in the Research University*. Our preferred meeting time would be late afternoon/cocktail hour.

Patricia Olynyk

Director, Graduate School of Art
Florence and Frank Bush Professor of Art
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Affiliate Faculty, Theater and Performing Arts Department
Affiliate Faculty, Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Monika Weiss

Associate Professor
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Affiliate Faculty, Performing Arts Department

Cheryl Wassenaar

Chair of Design
Associate Professor
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

Julia A. Walker

Associate Professor of English and Drama
Director of Graduate Studies
Performing Arts Department

Ila Nicole Sheren, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Department of Art History & Archaeology
Arts & Sciences

Ignacio Infante, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Comparative Literature and Romance Languages & Literatures
Arts & Sciences

David Marchant

Professor of the Practice
Performing Arts Department/Dance
Coordinator, Somatic Studies

Sung Ho Kim

Associate Professor of Architecture
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Axi:Ome llc
design director

Jesse Vogler

Visiting Assistant Professor
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Art

Robert Mark Morgan

Scenic / Industrial / Exhibit Design

Enrique Von Rohr

Director, Research & Technology
Senior Lecturer, Communication Design
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

Irene Domingo

Ph.D. Candidate, Romance Languages & Literatures
Arts & Sciences