

College/University Relationships

The town-gown relationship is in working order only when it is to benefit the college. There is a good working relationship with specific departments, but not much with the administration. . . . However, the community has probably done more for the college than it has really readily acknowledged or recognized.

Various arts council directors

Arts councils came into the presenting business long after many, many colleges and universities all over the United States ran a fine arts series, a performing arts series, a community events series, or a public events office on their campuses. These concert series have had an important influence on college students, especially the GI Bill veterans, for whom it reinforced the idea that culture was important here as it had been among the local residents overseas. As a part of their student ticket, they were exposed to art, theater, and music.¹

Concurrent with the development of arts councils has been the expansion of college programs to include the concepts of continuing education, lifelong learning, and adult community education of various kinds, most of which have included the arts as coursework. But these movements did not mingle with the activities of most community arts councils because, in some cases, both were "getting off the ground." In the future it seems that there is

indeed some potential for cosponsorship, as has been shown with the artist residency programs on the college campuses in North Carolina, a program supported by the colleges and universities in conjunction with the state council. This is echoed in other states. Often the community council assists in the planning and implementation of all of the resident activities. But one bellwether of the increasing numbers of councils now bringing in performances to their communities is their membership in ACUCAA.

In the mid-1970s, there was still very little recognition of the community as a resource and audience on the part of those who had been operating from the college campuses. During the last five years, the message is clearer in a number of ways — audience development being only one — that town-gown relationships are mutually beneficial and necessary.

The annual conference of ACUCAA, usually held in New York City, is an opportunity for those attending to exchange information, to grow as professionals with seminars and workshops filled with up-to-date information and problem-solving techniques, and to meet with many artist management representatives. The ACUCAA organization is one of the few places where those who in their communities have presenting roles can share concerns. There are other organizations having to do with theater and auditorium management, but even arts councils without facilities to run may benefit from the expertise of ACUCAA. On the program in 1980, for the first time, were such topics as “Your Facility as a Community Resource” and “Expanding Networks of Touring Support — The Regional Arts Organizations.”

The Mid-American Alliance is just such a regional arts organization — the oldest — and when the Arts Council in Manhattan, Kansas, assisted in bringing to the local audiences the Joffrey Ballet, Martha Graham Company, and San Francisco Ballet performances, it acknowledged that Kansas State University has one of the few full-service facilities in the area able to accommodate major dance, music, and theater companies.

The relationship between colleges and arts councils is still a bit rough in many communities. Even though some may cosponsor a special events series, there are still some tensions over what colleges believe is appropriate for their participation. The concert series may be; the arts festival may not be, as an example. Many arts council directors have expressed the need for a way to break through the rather aloof traditional patterns and involve the colleges with the communities. Most have agreed that the reduction of college resources for special events, which has occurred on many campuses, may help this happen.

The councils would like to have a good working relationship with the colleges in their communities. Many establish such relationships in a variety of ways. Ohio State University and the Greater Columbus Arts Council have cosponsored “Studies in Arts Administration”; Minneapolis has used

work-study students from the University of Minnesota for research; the formal university arts management programs, especially, across the country, have used their communities for internships and field work.

At least three rather unique community programs exist that have council or university bases. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in providing community services (a requirement of a land-grant college), provides space and services such as postage and duplication (paid back after each year's operation) to the Arts Extension Service, part of the university's Extension Division. The major funding for Arts Extension comes from an annual Art Festival that the staff works on all year. They publish an artists' directory (paid for by the artists listed and those who subscribe to it).

The Arts Extension Service was founded in 1973 as a consulting agency for arts councils in cities and towns throughout western Massachusetts. They have expanded in response to need into seminars, workshops, publications, and the compilation of a file on individual artists and their services. At one count, the file had 3,500 names of artists, craftspersons, and performers. Over the years, the Arts Extension Service has assisted some interesting projects, most geared to the special needs of the elderly, inner-city or rural populations, and the handicapped.

The Arts Extension Service provides an example of utilizing an educational institution for community outreach services. Although extension services are old ways for expanding university service into communities, this is one of the most concentrated efforts to date in the arts.² Particularly noteworthy was the University of Wisconsin Department of Extension Arts' three-year program (1966-69) "to pioneer in the area of arts development in small communities."³

The Two Rivers Arts Council is a consortium of local arts agencies in seven counties in Illinois. It was formed as a catalyst and resource for the small communities of the counties by the Dean of Fine Arts at Western Illinois University in Macomb, who felt the university's responsibility to act as a cultural center for the region. The Council, whose coordinator divides time between arts development at the university and the Arts Council, has since 1978 sponsored an annual writing program for the elderly, a resulting book of local lore and traditions, university artists' performances in the towns, and a project to document the 68 opera houses in the region. There is a cooperation and spirit here between the college and the residents of the region that might be a model for rural arts council development.

The Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa takes the "Humanities" portion of its title seriously, and so do the university scholars. The Council describes its growth in this area, which concerns "nearly every form of human endeavor which relates to the creation and study of philosophical, cultural and aesthetic values," as one of being a stimulator of existing agencies to cosponsor and initiate humanities projects. During the Bicentennial,

the Council generated nine months of public forums via radio and film programs in the "American Issues Forum in Tulsa." The Humanities Scholar-in-residence hosts a series over radio, including interviews, readings, and panel discussions with prominent personalities in the fields of history, entertainment, literature, and politics. Twice a year, the council publishes *Nimrod* (formerly published by Tulsa University) — now more than 20 years old — an international literary magazine. The council has run the Tulsa Humanities Institute, a consortium dedicated to intense study of current issues through the perspective of various disciplines of the humanities.⁴

The arts council within the university setting has been an important advice, advocacy, and support body for almost a decade at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Council for the Arts at MIT, flexible and molded to circumstances, works there as a catalytic agency to develop new support for proposed work in the arts by both faculty and students. With the backing of the top administrators, which is an important component, it attracts outside monies that might not be channeled to such an institution without special effort. Over the first seven years, about \$250,000 has been raised for about 180 projects. About one-third more has been raised through matching plans for some of the monies. There has been an \$18 million building for the arts on the drawing boards, which just couldn't have happened were it not for this well-honed "friends of the arts" idea, backed by the Council's organizational structure and impact on all areas of the arts. The idea could be generated in any size college setting, just as the arts council idea has been valuable to large and small communities. It takes leadership and vision. There are a few such university councils throughout the country.

This type of council starts with the potential of the arts at the university itself and reinforces that potential with community support, giving people who would not ordinarily participate at that institution an opportunity to do so on behalf of the arts — not a particular art form only.

Colleges, universities, and arts councils have mutual interests, growing from the college interests in the community and the council's coordinating and catalyst role. There should be more collaboration in the future, and more variation on these themes. Whether delivering new audiences or studies in the area of the discrete arts, arts administration, contemporary arts issues, or community events in the arts, there are natural concerns that generate points of communication and cosponsorship between arts councils and colleges and universities. With the interests in the arts stimulated, there might be new approaches and dimension to areas of study and research as well. One would hope, too, that some attention could be given to long-range efforts so that community-initiated pilot programs of value to the academic institutions might be absorbed into the institutional fabric by good mutual planning.

NOTES

1. Interview with James Backas, 1980.
2. Valerie West, "Arts Extension Service," in *A New Kind of Currency: A National Conference on the Role of the Arts in Economic Development* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Arts Commission, 1978).
3. Federal Grants A-02042-1, A-68-0-57, and A-69-0-53, July 1966–June 1969. Grants given by the National Endowment for the Arts to the Office of Community Arts Development, University of Wisconsin Department of Extension Arts.
4. The Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa, Oklahoma, *Annual Report*, 1980–81, p. 1.