

New Roads to Music Outreach in Higher Education: Partnerships with Colleges of Natural Resources and Agriculture

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An important part of the history of public higher education in the United States was the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862. President Abraham Lincoln signed this legislation that "...granted to each state 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative under apportionment based on the 1860 census. Proceeds from the sale of these lands were to be invested in a perpetual endowment fund which would provide support for colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts in each of the states." (See "Land Grant Act: History and Institutions. Access Nov. 4, 2007. Available from http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/morrill_acts.htm).

This legislation brought into being a national network of "land-grant" universities which, to this day, pursues an agenda of teaching, research, and service to the citizens in that state. As initially conceived, one of the most important dimensions of the land-grant mission was that of extension education through which the land grant University extended the results of its research in agriculture and engineering in order to facilitate the work of farmers, ranchers, and others engaged in the agricultural sciences. More recently, however, the notion of service has evolved into the idea of outreach and engagement, signifying a more active and shared partnership between the land-grant university and the citizenry, and into an agenda for extension education that includes not only agriculture and mechanical arts, but the enhancement of the overall quality of life in the state in general. Based on the assumption that quality of life includes the arts and arts education, the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts (CFPA) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (a major, public, Research-1, land-grant university in the Midwest United States) has forged a new partnership with the University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) in an effort to integrate the fine and performing arts into the University's outreach and engagement effort. This presentation is a case-study report that describes this partnership and the various initiatives that have been developed and implemented over the past six years.

The idea of the partnership idea was conceived initially out of a two-fold need, namely that of CASNR to expand its extension education activities and of CFPA to develop a focused and aggressive agenda for arts engagement throughout the state of Nebraska, but particularly in the state's rural communities. The challenge for CFPA was to identify a mechanism for extending itself beyond the University campus, and following a series of conversations between the CASNR and CFPA Deans, it was mutually agreed that the University's extension education network, the Cooperative Extension Division, would be the most productive and expedient way in which to meet this challenge.

Since those initial conversations, an initiative targeting arts outreach and engagement with elementary and high-school-age students has emerged and taken root successfully. Working

in cooperation with the Chair/Directors of the CFPA arts units and the extension-education leaders in CASNR, an array of summer education programs been undertaken that utilize the state's three 4-H Summer Camps as the fora for arts activities. With funding provided by CFPA and by CASNR, arts students from the University were given summer internships to design curricula for teaching music, art, dance, theatre, and filmmaking to the 4-H Camp students, many of whom had had no formal arts instruction in their K-12 settings at all. In addition to the obvious benefits to the 4-H students themselves, the University arts interns, a significant number of whom were not in arts teacher education programs, had an opportunity to experience the challenges associated with delivering arts instruction in a one-week time frame to young students who had minimal or no prior formal experience with the arts.

Through their work and the documentation that was required as part of the internship, University arts interns were able to gain fresh perspectives about the value of engaging young students in arts activities and the importance, in their preparation as emerging artists, of skills for engaging the wider community in the arts in one way or another throughout their careers. In addition, the success of the arts internship initiative paved the way for the gradual establishment of arts outreach as a significant component in the University's extension education portfolio. Finally, the arts internship initiative led to the development of shorter (three-day), customized, on-site, summer-camp, arts experiences in a number of the more rural counties in the state, in which University students in a particular arts area were matched with a local community that was seeking instruction in that arts area for its youngsters.

A second, more recent initiative involved the University's resident string chamber group, the Chiara String Quartet (www.chiaraquartet.net), performing a five-day performance tour in some of the most rural communities in Nebraska. This initiative, designed by the CASNR and CFPA Deans, in partnership with the University's Chancellor and Vice President for Agriculture, was founded upon the same outreach and engagement premise as the 4-H Summer Camp initiative and organized in similar fashion through the University's Cooperative Extension network. Throughout their tour, the University musicians engaged with audiences of all ages in non-traditional performing venues that included a local movie theatre in a community of 700 residents, an agricultural research center, and a rural camp setting in the Nebraska State Forest. University administrators accompanying the Quartet included the University's Chancellor and Vice President for Agriculture, as well as the CASNR and CFPA Deans and the Director of the School of Music. In addition, two students from the CFPA's Film program documented the entire tour, capturing over twenty-four hours of tape that will be formulated into a twenty-minute documentary on the initiative during the 2008-2009 academic year.

All of these initiatives have succeeded beyond the most optimistic projections of the outreach planners. New initiatives between Fine and Performing Arts and Agriculture are now in the planning stages, as are new partnerships with other campus units. As collaborations and shared initiatives in higher education continue to gain momentum and importance, it will be increasingly important for those involved in arts education in higher education to seek any and all opportunities to forge partnerships that can foster relationships between the arts and other disciplines, thereby enabling the infusion of the arts and arts education into all dimensions of the University.