

MEMORANDUM

To: General Education Curriculum Committee
From: Curriculum Committee of the College of Fine Arts
Date: 1 January 2011
Re: Fine Arts Requirement in the General Education Curriculum

Request: That the current 9 credits of Humanities in the General Education curriculum be amended to specify that 3 of those credits must be taken in a Fine Arts discipline.

Rationale

The current General Education curriculum groups the fine arts into a general humanities requirement. Thus, students could complete the requirement without ever taking a course in the fine arts. We contend that a serious foundation in the humanities cannot be complete without an introduction to the arts.

Specifically, the study of the arts balances mediated language-based understanding with ways of producing human knowledge through direct experiences. Direct sensing, feeling, and responding to – in addition to the non-linear synthesis of – experiences all expand and enhance thinking and creative problem solving skills. Thus, the arts are a gateway to transformational experiences and transformational thinking that can equip students to create the kinds of leadership roles required in the next generation. The arts also reinforce learning in other disciplines as they broaden the appreciation of creative human endeavors across time, technologies, and cultures, helping to prepare students to live lives of service that can transform the world.

- Scholars such as Daniel Pink, Ken Robinson, and Mitchel Resnick all affirm the critical importance of infusing education with experiences/courses that will teach creativity.
 - o Daniel Pink, in his *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*,¹ makes a compelling case that we are entering a “conceptual age,” in which leaders will be people who can help society take full advantage of the advances of the “information age.” These will be people who can think conceptually, synthetically, innovatively, that is, creative people. Some of the most compelling examples of this can be found in the work of IDEO, one of the world’s leading design companies. IDEO has designed items as diverse as chairs that support body movements and that are made from recycled materials, specialty caulk dispensers, mobil email devices, and folding tables with unique characteristics – all through processed that engage problem solving through creative techniques. (IDEO processes have been utilized at UF in a design course in which art and engineering students teamed up to design new pollution sensing

¹ (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

- devices.) IDEO purposely hires people with diverse skills and, in particular, “people who can think conceptually, synthetically, innovatively, that is, creative people.”
- Ken Robinson echoes Pink’s ideas: “The world economies are caught up in a genuine paradigm change. The new technologies do not mean simply that we have new ways of doing things we did before: businesses, organizations and individuals everywhere are faced with entirely new forms of work, leisure and ways of being.... There are profound consequences for the development of creative abilities and for the whole idea of human resources, educations, training and economic competitiveness.”²
 - Mitchell Resnick, the Director of MIT’s Media Laboratory, affirms both Pink and Robinson: “The future will be based not on how much we know, but on our ability to think and act creatively. The proliferation of digital technologies has accentuated the need for creative thinking in all aspects of our lives, and has also provided tools that can help us improve and reinvent ourselves. Throughout the world, computing and communications technologies are sparking a new entrepreneurial spirit, the creation of innovative products and services and increased productivity. The importance of well educated creative citizens is greater than ever before.”³
 - While it is possible to talk anecdotally about artistic experiences that are life changing, or transformational, it is also possible to talk clinically about how the arts change lives. The work of UF’s dance students with Parkinson’s patients is but one story. There are many chronicled in such works as Penny Lewis’ *Creative Transformation: the Healing Power of the Arts*.⁴
 - Additionally, study in the arts strengthens learning in all areas, which reinforces the concept of the arts as key contributors to the development of whole-brain thinking and strengthening preparation for professional work in Daniel Pink’s “post-information age.”⁵

In the state of Florida, the University of Florida would not be alone in recognizing the specific values of having a specific fine arts requirement in the General Education curriculum. In the State University System of Florida there are four institutions that currently have a specific fine arts requirement as part of their general education curriculum: Florida Atlantic University,⁶ Florida International University, University of West Florida, and University of South Florida. In addition, many of UF’s peer institutions have a specific fine arts requirement in the General Education curriculum, including the University of Texas, Ohio State University, Penn State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Virginia, and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to mention a few.

Capacity

In terms of SCH’s, the College of Fine Arts already regularly teaches approximately 1/3 of the General Education credits offered at UF. Most of our courses have additional capacity. However, of more significance is that in the last two years we have taken eight of our General Education courses online. We expect to take more online this year. These courses would provide ample capacity to handle the increased load this requirement might generate.

² *Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative*, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Capstone Publishing, 2001), 92.

³ Michael Resnick, *Rethinking Learning in the Digital Age. In The Global Information Technology Report: Readiness for the Networked World*, edited by G. Kirkman. Oxford University Press. (2002) Accessed at <http://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers.html> on 15 February 2008.

⁴ Penny Lewis, *Creative Transformation: the Healing Power of the Arts* (Brooklyn, NY: Chiron Publications, 1993).

⁵ For example, see Maureen Harris, *Music and the Young Mind: Enhancing Brain Development and Enhancing Learning* (Lanham, MD: R&L Publications, 2009); also *Music Makes the Difference: Music, Brain Development and Learning* (Reston, VA: MENC, 2000).

⁶ FAU requires six credits among two of the following areas: literature, creative and performing arts, architecture.

Conclusion

Ken Robinson claims that children are naturally disposed to creative thinking, but that our current educational system discourages rather than develops creativity in students. He also states that creativity can, indeed, be taught.⁷ We believe that, if we can teach and assess creative processes, it could change the very fabric of at UF, and perhaps of higher education in America. A Fine Arts requirement in the General Education curriculum would be a critical step toward this end.

⁷ Presentation at the University of Florida, 15 January 2008.