

Carleton College

TOWARD A CONSCIOUSLY CREATIVE CAMPUS
A COLLABORATORY & MUSIC CENTER



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Opening Convocation, 2006:

To a standing-room-only audience of students, faculty and staff members, and friends of the College, Mary Easter, the Rae Schupack Nathan Professor of Dance and the Performing Arts, began her dance, *Knocking Over the Chair*. Ten minutes later, the Carleton community had witnessed a history lesson unlike any other. Through Professor Easter's dance/narrative of her story of growing up in legally segregated Petersburg, Virginia, we learned of the inspiring mentorship of her dance teacher, of the mentor's betrayal based on racial and gendered traditions—a betrayal made palpably painful by their closeness (“Margaret, I thought I was dancing with you!”), of the dramatic climax when Professor Easter realizes polite discourse will not do and in defiance she knocks over the chair that represents that fraudulent discourse. No one in the audience will understand 20th-century American history the same way again. No one in the audience will read or see or hear the story of the civil rights movement the same way again. If you were present at this performance, you are the better for it.

Professor Easter's convocation performance, while eloquent in its reflections on American history, also speaks to our community about the historic and future place of the arts in higher education. Professor Easter has knocked over many chairs, including one seriously entrenched chair that resulted in a changed College attitude toward the arts—a change that continues in this initiative. Early in her career Professor Easter wrote to the dean and president that among her career goals was to “reveal the art of dance as a



Carleton Players performance

worthy pursuit for Carleton students.” While the College has matured well beyond that point, there is an increasingly coherent voice from higher education that the best curricula of the 21st century will be those that take fuller advantage of the arts in the education of all students. The goals that underlie an education for a 21st-century citizen—creativity, critical thinking, effective communication, engagement with other cultures, collaboration—are those that need nurturing wherever possible. No discipline can hope to succeed alone. It is the synergy from connecting disciplines and breaking down silos that can propel the College along a transformative course toward achieving these objectives. The arts can be a critical catalyst. Finding the resources and support for this forward-looking curriculum is a serious challenge for the College. This report is a step toward charting a route to effect that change: our attempt to knock over a chair.

SUPPORT FOR THE CONSCIOUSLY CREATIVE CAMPUS

In our earlier report, *Building the Consciously Creative Campus*, the trustees, alumni, faculty and staff members, administrators, and students on the Arts Planning Committee argued for the need to develop a new facility that would enhance the creative and transformative effects of interdisciplinary collaboration and experiences across the entire College curriculum and co-curriculum. Carleton, after all, is known for producing outstanding scientists, social scientists, humanists, artists, teachers, business leaders, and professionals of all kinds—the kind of citizens who make a difference in the world. Our challenge today is to develop a curriculum supported by facilities to better engage a 21st-century world with imagination and daring. Not only did this strike a very responsive chord within the Carleton community, it was in sync with an increasingly vocal national conversation about the importance of innovation. As summed up by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman,

On such a flat earth, the most important attribute you can have is creative imagination—the ability to be the first on the block to figure out how all these enabling tools can be put together in new and exciting ways to create products, communities, opportunities, and profits. That has always been America's strength because America was, and for now still is, the world's greatest dream machine.¹

We concluded that the purchase of the Northfield Middle School invites the development of a facility geared toward creative collaboration—known informally as the Collaboratory²—where departments and students could

¹ Friedman, Thomas. *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2006, p. 469.

² We thank Marjorie Garber, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of English at Harvard University, for introducing the campus to this term.

work together in imaginative and transformative ways that support and feature a reimagined curriculum; one with an objective of creating a workshop where biologists become better biologists, economists become better economists, and, of course, artists become better artists.

Over a frenetic summer and fall of 2006, the Arts Planning Committee and other faculty and staff members from around the College worked with professional architectural consultants toward a goal of identifying space, staff, classroom, and technology needs for supporting the curricular vision we tenaciously kept in front of us. The process we carried out was independent of any particular physical structure and resulted in a far better understanding of the physical, staffing, and technological requirements to realize the full campus-wide potential of the initiative. The study also demonstrated clearly that a comprehensive program that integrates the arts more fully into the College curriculum does not fit within the size constraints of the Middle School site. Faced with difficult choices, we reluctantly agreed that of all the arts programs, the music program could flourish most effectively in an integrated Music Center at a separate location. The Collaboratory and the Music Center together symbolize and facilitate our vision of an expanded, multidisciplinary curriculum to enhance creativity and stimulate the productive collisions and collaborations among faculty members and students that long have been a hallmark of a Carleton education. Creativity can become a habit of mind only if it takes root early in an undergraduate's life as a habit of being.



Advanced Painting class

OUR RECOMMENDATION TO THE PRESIDENT: THE COLLABORATORY AND A MUSIC CENTER

To create spaces where productive collaboration among faculty members and students might take place most effectively, we concluded that the new facilities must contain both innovative technologies and the technical assistance that would support multiple student and classroom projects. Fully staffed and equipped facilities allow all faculty members to teach with words, images, sounds, and narrative in a variety of media. Faculty in all departments and programs will be invited to use the classrooms; the building itself will inspire faculty members to assign projects that will employ video, photography, sound, live performance, and artistic creation. The act of making promotes student learning through creative products.



Semaphore Repertory Dance Company



New pedagogies and modes of thinking would be supported and enriched by proximity to the relocated Perlman Center for Learning and Teaching. Student work—increasingly multidisciplinary, technically sophisticated, and media-centric—would be fostered by a centralized technical support system (Digital Asset Resource Center), and the current Presentation, Events, and Production Support office (PEPS). The diverse, multicultural riches of the College, the region, the country, and the world would be brought to the Carleton community through a teaching museum, a dramatic theater, a cinema theater, a small black box theater, dance studios, and KRLX. The curricular core of the Collaboratory would be the academic departments of studio art, art history, cinema & media studies, theater & dance, and English, providing a combination of departments, facilities, and support services that will guarantee abundant creative synergy.

While not physically connected to the Collaboratory, the music department is very much a central partner in the broader initiative. Thanks to the comprehensive space programming exercise conducted during the summer and fall, we have a well-informed understanding of the facility requirements. We know that our students and faculty members require appropriate offices, studios, practice rooms, performance facilities,



Orchestra members in concert

and rehearsal spaces. The overarching objective: an integrated music center that helps consolidate a program that is currently too scattered. More work needs to be done to identify the best physical location for this facility, but the College must position the Music Center and the Collaboratory optimally to establish two anchors of the consciously creative campus.

As we wrote in our mission statement, “Creativity as a Habit of Being,” (September 2006):

The new Carleton arts initiative is not just for artists. It is both the symbol of, and the workshop for, a transformative vision of the College's mission. If ideas are the currency of the future, then the college that places creativity at the center of its curriculum develops in its students the core quality necessary to succeed in the 21st century.

GETTING IT DONE

Costs in the Middle School building will vary: Where technology and support is necessary, such as for the theater and museum, costs will be high, but classrooms and offices will be moderately priced. The scale of the project mandates that we prudently attend to distinctions between those spaces where more renovation is truly necessary and those that require far less renovation. Since the size and scale of both of these projects are large, the Arts Planning Committee has discussed possible phasing models. Any fully developed phasing model—one with well-informed cost estimates and that addresses the physical realities of combining a complicated set of programs—requires the expertise and help of an architectural firm. The College is on schedule to choose an architect in June 2007; that architect will have the benefit of all of the research performed to date on the comprehensive needs for the arts at Carleton.

Carleton's attention to the arts coincides with national calls for creativity in the workplace as well as the academy. A typical example, from the National Center on Education and the Economy, a nonprofit organization engaged in educational policy analysis:

A very high level of preparation in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, science, literature, history, and the arts will be an indispensable foundation for everything that comes after for most members of the workforce. It is a world in which comfort with ideas and abstractions is the passport to a good job, in which creativity and innovation are the key to the good life, in which high levels of education—a very different kind of education than most of us have had—are going to be the only security there is.³

³ National Center of Education and the Economy. *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. Washington, D.C., 2007. Executive summary, 7.

Higher education in the 21st century requires innovative, interdisciplinary pedagogies supported by appropriate technical facilities. This comprehensive initiative accomplishes a visionary leap toward a new intellectual environment for teaching and learning at Carleton. By promoting new levels of creativity, expression, communication, and performance ranging across the arts, social sciences, sciences, and humanities, we will better prepare our students for living productive and rewarding lives in the 21st century. In so doing, we respond to student demand for more and better arts programming, affirm a recognition in higher education nationally of the critical importance of integrating the arts across the curriculum, speak to the demand on the part of employers and government leaders for creative habits of mind, and take advantage of local opportunities offered by the availability of space on the southern doorstep of the Carleton campus.



MEMBERS OF THE ARTS PLANNING COMMITTEE

Clyde Anani '07, *Student Representative*

Scott Bierman, *Dean of the College and Professor of Economics*

Laurel Bradley, *Director of Exhibitions and
Curator of the College Art Collection*

Philip Chan '06, *Student Representative*

Rhonda Christie, *Administrative Assistant for Business and Finance and
in Cinema & Media Studies*

Clifford Clark P'95, '01, *Professor of History and M. A. and A. D. Hulings
Professor of American Studies*

Joel Cooper, *Director of Information and Technology Services*

David Diamond '80, *Trustee*

Carol Donelan, *Assistant Professor of Cinema & Media Studies*

Mary Easter, *Rae Schupack Nathan Professor of Dance
and the Performing Arts*

Elise Eslinger '92, *Special Assistant to the President for
Administration and Planning*

Mark Gleason, *Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations*

Robin Hart Ruthenbeck, *Director of Campus Activities*

Martha Kaemmer '66, *Trustee*

Alison Kettering, *William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Art History*

Robert Lamppa, *Senior Project Manager/Owner's Representative,
Facilities and Capital Planning*

Martin Miller '07, *Student Representative*

Stephen Mohring, *Assistant Professor of Art*

David Musicant, *Associate Professor of Computer Science*

Diane Nemec-Ignashev, *Professor of Russian*

Lawrence Perlman '60, *Trustee*

Ronald Rodman, *Professor of Music*

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Samantha Schaal '07, *Student Representative*
John Schott, *James Woodward Strong Professor of the Liberal Arts,*
Chair of Cinema & Media Studies
Steven Spehn, *Director of Facilities and Capital Planning*
Gregory Blake Smith, *Professor of English, Chair of English*
Ruth Weiner, *Class of 1944 Professor of Theater and the Liberal Arts,*
Professor of English, Chair of Theater and Dance
Karen Zukowski '80, *Alumna*



Student curators

Carleton College
One North College Street
Northfield, MN 55057