A growing number of colleges and universities are expanding and deepening the role that publicly engaged scholarship in the humanities, arts, and design can play in contributing to positive change in the communities and regions within which higher education institutions exist. This paper provides an overview of how this is happening, largely through mutually beneficial partnerships between campuses and communities. Such collaborations aim to leverage assets as well as tackle local problems through the unique capacities of humanities, arts, and design while enhancing faculty teaching and research, preparing students with practical skills needed for jobs, and influencing higher education institutions’ commitment and responsibility to civic purpose.

Through the lens of Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, the only national coalition working explicitly at the nexus of publicly engaged scholarship and the humanities, arts, and design, author Jamie Haft exemplifies the range of work as it is practiced through courses, projects, programs, centers, institutes, and institution-wide initiatives. Approaches include: bringing students into community settings and community members onto campus; collaborating with communities to work on local problems; creating an institutional home for community-based artists; enhancing civic learning and democratic participation; and changing (and even transforming) higher education in order to create conditions in which publicly engaged scholarship can flourish. Haft describes barriers that must be overcome for the “somewhat idiosyncratic array of scholarly and creative activities to coalesce into a movement capable of helping solve the most serious problems our communities, nation, and world now face,” and offers recommendations to begin to set such change in motion.
INTRODUCTION

As someone enrolled part-time in graduate school while working full-time, I relate to students across the country who are upset about the rising costs of higher education and the falling number of job opportunities that a diploma is supposed to guarantee. If livelihoods weren't enough for us Millennials to worry about, there are big global issues like climate change, general environmental degradation, population growth, and predictions of increasing stress on water and food supplies. In the United States, we are also dealing with massive incarceration rates and the criminalization of migration; income disparity, endemic poverty, and mounting national debt (including student loans); persistent racial inequality; an infant mortality rate that’s one of the highest among developed countries; and more. A young person could easily feel that he or she is stepping out of school and into a collapsing ecosystem.

What responsibility do colleges and universities have in addressing these issues critical to a reasonable future? Some leaders argue that colleges and universities should focus almost exclusively on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), because these fields, they argue, hold the most potential for job creation and economic growth—and because they are the fields most equipped for solving our most pressing real-world problems. But are these STEM advocates underestimating the power of the humanities, arts, and design in shaping our future? Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life (IA), a national consortium of 90 colleges and universities based at Syracuse University, believes this to be the case.

IA was conceived in 1999 at a White House Conference, “Honor the Past – Imagine the Future.” IA founders saw the opportunity to create a national organization that could bring together the growing number of scholars and higher education institutions concerned with public humanities and community-based artistic creation and production. They recognized that the foundation for such public scholarship and applied artistic practice would be partnerships with community members and their organizations. From these mutually beneficial partnerships many good things would flow: local problems, both on and off campus, could be more effectively tackled; faculty teaching and research would improve; students would gain skills needed for jobs in the new economy; and, on a grander scale, a more unified epistemology would begin to emerge, in opposition to the fragmentation of knowledge that was being reinforced by the trend of proprietary specialization. Finally, IA’s founders believed that publicly engaged scholarship would strengthen the democratic virtue of civic participation.

Today, IA is the only national coalition working explicitly at the nexus of publicly engaged scholarship and the humanities, arts, and design. As IA’s communications manager, my vantage point is both national, across IA’s consortium, as well as local in my Syracuse community and at Syracuse University.
University of Minnesota and Juxtaposition Arts

Artists and scholars collaborate on solving community-identified problems in this partnership between the University of Minnesota’s College of Design and Juxtaposition Arts (JA), a community-minded, youth-oriented visual arts organization in North Minneapolis. Project participants include undergraduate and graduate students, university faculty, K-12 students from the JA afterschool program, JA staff, and community artists. The organization focuses on the built and natural environment along the West Broadway Corridor, a major commercial street in the community where JA is located, which is marked by high unemployment and high poverty. Participants use arts, culture, and design to leverage and improve the Corridor’s livability, safety, and social and financial capital, in partnership with the people who live there. Recent projects include: developing plans for a land bridge over the freeway; creating a market and commons in what is currently a suburban strip mall parking lot; building two small parks and hand-painting murals there; and designing bus stops with imagery based on the hopes and fears of community residents who ride the bus. 

DeAnna Cummings, co-founder and executive director of Juxtaposition Arts, with young artists Dan, Elijah, and DeRoyce, discuss a mural painted by the youth. Photo: Barb Davis

Photo: Lynne Elizabeth
ANTECEDENTS

American higher education has often explicitly embraced a civic mission. The Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant colleges and universities to give working-class students the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills important not only to the job market of their day but to their civic role in a young and developing democracy.² The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s subsequent Extension Service programs at land-grant institutions such as the University of Wisconsin and Cornell University sponsored some of the first campus-community partnerships in the arts.³ The 1890 Morrill Act extended the land-grant program to black colleges in the South, an important marker for institutionalizing racial opportunity within the higher education structure. After World War II, such land-grant institutions became known as “democracy colleges,” and the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (informally, the G.I. Bill) paved the way with tuition support combined with unemployment benefits for veterans to prepare for a productive return to civilian life. A version of the G.I. Bill has been in effect ever since.

Twentieth-century leaders like W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, Myles Horton, and Septima Clark integrated scholarship and activism and pushed for deep community engagement.⁴ Beginning in the mid-1980s, a national conversation about strengthening higher education’s civic purpose was sparked by leading education theorists like Ernest Boyer⁵, and newly created campus centers and national associations set about facilitating student community service. One of the first of these national associations was Campus Compact, which currently has 1,100 members. By 1985, there was also a vibrant field of public humanists and community-based artists and designers, many of whom had been active in the 1960s civil rights movement and in subsequent social justice struggles. They were supported by public agencies, including the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the Labor Department’s Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

A growing number of scholars in humanities, arts, and design disciplines recognized the new thinking and creativity coming from these leaders of grassroots arts and humanities programs, and they began looking for ways and means to collaborate with them to make their academic work more useful to the public. Together, these scholars and grassroots leaders critiqued the prevalent higher education community service and subsequent service-learning models as being unidirectional, from campus to community. By the time of IA’s founding in 1999, academic and grassroots leaders were resetting the bar for publicly engaged art and scholarship to emphasize equitable, two-way partnerships between campus and community. As some of these grassroots activist-artists and public intellectuals migrated into the academy, they became instrumental in developing academic programs in the public humanities and applied arts and in founding departments of women’s and ethnic studies.
THE WORK

Today, effective and responsible publicly engaged scholarship in the humanities, arts, and design shares a common set of values: 

- Reciprocity and mutual benefit in campus-community partnerships, scholarship, and teaching
- Participation, transparency, dialogue, and pluralism
- Innovation and integration of knowledge to improve communities
- Cultural diversity and social equity

Encompassing a range of intentions, methods, and outcomes, the work is practiced at numerous scales – through courses, projects, programs, centers, institutes, institution-wide initiatives, and in collaboration with other colleges and universities regionally and globally. While the examples that follow are from my experience with IA’s consortium of majority research universities, it is important to note the prevalence and vitality of this work at a range of institutions, including community colleges, tribal colleges, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Some initiatives bring students into community settings and others bring community members onto the campus. The Cultures and Communities program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee engages undergraduate students in projects in the local community as part of fulfilling their general education requirements in courses like U.S. multicultural studies, global and international analysis, and the community and cultural contexts of art, science, health, and technology. By focusing their general education requirements in this civically minded manner, students from any major, school, or college at the University can earn the additional credential of a certificate. More than 200 students have completed the certificate since the program began in 2004.

Fordham University’s Bronx African American History Project, which documents the experience of the more than 500,000 people of African descent in the borough of the Bronx, engages scholars and community residents in neighborhood tours, oral history interviews, and local exhibits at the Bronx County Historical Society. Mark Naison, who founded the project, holds to a teaching philosophy that strives to make what goes on in the classroom relevant to Fordham’s...
surrounding communities, and high school students and neighborhood residents often participate in his classes. “It creates a wonderful synergy and a sense of excitement. People are crossing barriers and interacting with people they might not normally meet, and exploring new possibilities for what they’re going to do in the future,” Naison states.7

Some projects make discipline-specific scholarship accessible to the wider community and public. For the last ten years, David Zonderman, Professor and Associate Department Head in History at North Carolina State University, has collaborated with other labor history scholars to advise a coalition of unions. For example, they researched the present-day implications of a 1959 state law that banned all public workers from collective bargaining.8

At Vanderbilt University’s Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, a group of faculty members explored the experience of people of African descent in the formation of Europe, and created a twelve-minute documentary and curriculum guide that was sent to all public and private high schools in the state of Tennessee.9

Some initiatives collaborate with communities to work on local problems. At California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, Professor Susan Mulley’s landscape architecture students created a plan for transforming a creek that runs through the city of Escondido, which was channelized in the 1960s to control floods. Students presented their plan to the city council, hosted bike walks, collected data from community meetings, and employed research methods used in urban planning. To sustain such experiences, Mulley co-founded the campus-based California Center for Land and Water Stewardship.10
At the University of New Mexico, humanities faculty explored “Security and Insecurity” in partnership with community organizations looking to bridge a rift between high school students in Los Alamos, a city on a high ridge, and the city of Espanola in the valley.¹¹

At University of California-Santa Barbara, faculty implemented a series of public programs and curricular initiatives to generate creative solutions in response to the housing crisis. According to Kim Yasuda, co-director of the statewide University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, the public programs generated a suite of ongoing community arts and design initiatives that place students in local settings around these issues. In partnership with Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, an affordable housing nonprofit, students are helping to develop a 52-unit housing complex for seasonal farm workers in Oxnard; repurposing used shipping containers for housing and artist studio space; and renovating the storefront of a local bakery to serve as a community center for gallery exhibitions and performances.¹²

Some engaged work creates an institutional home for community-based artists. Since 1970, Judy Baca has been leading community-based teams in creating large-scale murals in Los Angeles and beyond. In 1976, she co-founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) to produce, preserve, and educate people about community-based, public arts projects that reflect the lives and concerns of ethnically and economically diverse communities; the Great Wall of Los Angeles, which California’s Cultural and Historical Endowment has declared a site of public memory, is a notable example. In 1993, Latina/o students held a two-week hunger strike to advocate for change at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) where Baca was on the faculty. Following the strike, she was instrumental in developing the Chicano/a Studies and World Arts and Cultures Departments, noting that, “For the first time in my years as a university professor, it became possible for me to bring my community practice together with my university teaching.” In 1996, Baca founded UCLA’s Cesar Chavez Digital Mural Lab as a campus-community partnership with SPARC. The Lab is an academic path for students to participate in SPARC’s work, and provides cutting-edge technology for mural-making.¹³

Some undertakings emphasize a college or university’s civic responsibilities. At Brown University, President Ruth Simmons charged a Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice chaired by James T. Campbell, Professor of American Civilization, Africana Studies, and History, to investigate the University’s historic relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. From 2003-2006 the Committee rigorously studied historical documents, organized public programs meant to encourage reflection on the legacies of historical injustices as part of a national debate on reparations for slavery, and made recommendations for how the University could begin to ameliorate its past in the present.¹⁴

Syracuse University, led by Chancellor and President Nancy Cantor, is enacting its vision of Scholarship in Action to meet its responsibilities as an anchor institution in a rustbelt region. A range of major curricular and co-curricular initiatives and partnerships – such as
The Engagement Fellows, Mobile Literacy Arts Bus, La Casita Cultural Center, and the D.R.E.A.M. Freedom Revival—provide ample evidence of how the humanities, arts, and design disciplines animate and enhance the University’s engaged mission and revitalize its host city. Cantor writes: “In the end, it is precisely this unique power of the arts to demolish corrosive barriers and foster honest intercultural dialogue that makes them so essential to the life of a university as a public good. When universities turn their campuses into communities of practice in the arts, barriers between campus groups and with our neighbors dissolve.”

To enhance civic learning and democratic participation, some national efforts span higher education. The American Commonwealth Partnership is a national organizing effort to inspire a broad range of educational institutions— including community colleges, private liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and others—to strengthen their civic missions. In collaboration with the White House Office of Public Engagement, U.S. Department of Education, and Association of American Colleges and Universities, the American Commonwealth Partnership’s alliance of higher education, civic, and business groups is leading a yearlong effort to promote civic learning and agency across all disciplines, including the social and natural sciences. The initiative coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act.

IA itself is part of a national web of higher education networks, disciplinary associations, and campus-based civic engagement and social change organizations. Examples include the Association of American Colleges and Universities, American Association of State Colleges and Universities and its American Democracy Project, Modern Language Association, and New England Resource Center for Higher Education. And as part of its new emphasis on advocacy, in 2013 IA will launch an online journal.

Finally, some efforts focus on changing (and even transforming) higher education in order to create conditions in which publicly engaged scholarship can flourish. The University of Minnesota is infusing public engagement into the research, teaching, and service activities of its five campuses, with efforts underway to advance curricular development, assessment, and communications. A grant program supports teams of community partners, faculty, staff, and students to plan and implement public engagement at the departmental level. A survey of all undergraduate students is used to understand the scale and scope of student involvement in the University’s more than 200 public engagement units and centers. An online portal with resources about engagement activities is being developed for campus and community stakeholders. Finally, a university-wide council, versed in the contextual aspects of engagement, is exploring and addressing complicated ethical issues as they arise. As Associate Vice President Andrew Furco observes, “In the three years I’ve been at the University of Minnesota, the discourse about public scholarship has substantially
evolved, and we’re starting to turn the corner on understanding this work.” This comprehensive approach is creating the conditions for partnerships, like the one between the College of Design and Juxtaposition Arts described at the beginning of this article, to thrive.

Imagining America’s Tenure Team Initiative on Public Scholarship (TTI) seeks to change campus policies related to tenure and promotion in order to free faculty, administrators, and students from the impediments of undertaking publicly engaged art and scholarship, and to ensure such work is formally recognized as a legitimate scholarly and creative activity. Its seminal report, Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University, proposes a number of ways campuses can expand tenure and promotion policies. Representatives of 58 member campuses participated in IA regional meetings to strategize ways to implement the report’s findings at their respective institutions. Syracuse University’s leadership used the report during its four years of deliberation to revise its Faculty Manual.  

As promotion and tenure policies for publicly engaged scholarship have become more favorable, institutions have created professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. Macalester College has developed an American Studies Urban Faculty Colloquium in order to orient faculty members to the Twin Cities region, analyze urban issues and community struggles in the context of multiculturalism, and develop ways to integrate engagement into teaching and advising students. The University of Washington offers an interdisciplinary Certificate in Public Scholarship for graduate students, which includes 15 credits of academic study and an engaged capstone project. IA has fostered a network of graduate students through its national Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) program and Central New York PAGE chapter. With an agenda set by graduate students, PAGE members are developing theoretical frameworks for publicly engaged graduate education and creating opportunities for collaboration with peers and senior scholars and artists.
ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Considerable culture change in higher education will be necessary for this amazing but scattered, somewhat idiosyncratic array of scholarly and creative activities to coalesce into a movement capable of helping solve the most serious problems our communities, nation, and world now face. Imagining America’s co-sponsored 2008 research report, *The Curriculum Project: Culture and Community Development in Higher Education*, confirmed significant barriers to this full achievement and proposed some principles to guide future development.

- Within the academy, an overarching goal should be to infuse the values of publicly engaged scholarship across the institution, at all levels, and in all departments and disciplines.
- Publicly engaged scholarship requires meaningful, reciprocal, and collaborative relationships between educational institutions and community partners, and developing these relationships requires self-critical awareness from both parties.
- Sustained, participatory critical discourse is essential to the success of publicly engaged scholarship, and higher education institutions are well positioned to seek support for such discourse from within their own institution and from resource providers.
- Curricular excellence in publicly engaged scholarship is marked by a balance of community engagement; training in humanities, arts, and design disciplines; and scholarship focusing on the field’s history and animating ideas, as well as the economic and policy environments that shaped that history and sparked those ideas.
Publicly engaged scholarship in higher education should have an explicit goal of developing grassroots arts and humanities partnerships by supporting the community-based organizations that are essential to enacting the work.

There are numerous reasons why fostering equitable, community partnerships are a big challenge for colleges and universities. At the simplest of levels, it can be difficult to establish the rhythm required for deep engagement, given that students and faculty are regulated by an academic clock of semesters and quarters, and students expecting to be around only until graduation have limited attention spans. At a more profound level, there is a power imbalance in a partnership between a multi-million dollar university and an under-resourced community-based organization. As a corollary to such power dynamics, colleges and universities often, for a variety of reasons including real estate issues, bring to a public project a history of vexed relationships with their surrounding communities.

Epistemological differences present another barrier to effective campus-community partnerships. Some academics are concerned about engaged scholarship becoming biased and partisan in pursuit of social justice, replacing a scholarly ideal of disinterested objectivity. Moreover, public scholarship places equal emphasis on academic and community knowledge and typically crosses disciplines and even fields; some academics believe this is a recipe for the dilution of knowledge. Many art department faculty are trained to believe in the imperative of individual genius and thus have little interest in engaged scholarship’s regard for amateur participation or for the collective genius of a cultural community. Within the humanities discipline, as University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Gregory Jay observes, the classical liberal arts curriculum is often critiqued by new sub-fields like cultural studies for “its ivory-tower separation from real life and its various exclusionary biases of race, nation, class, and gender.”

In the field of design, it can be difficult to reconcile the idea of community input when students are being prepared for design-for-hire jobs where clients call the shots. As one drills down into academic culture, one begins to appreciate the complication and nuance stemming from such contending values and contentious epistemologies. A good example: typically the campus units leading community engagement efforts do not collaborate, much less make common cause, with the units leading efforts on race, class, gender, and other diversity issues.
All of these contested differences have an institutional dimension in which existing academic structures reinforce the status quo. Tenure and promotion policies are an example. IA’s 2005-2008 research confirmed that such policies typically penalize public scholarship, and that this penalization is especially discouraging for women and faculty of color. While higher education associations, including IA, are organizing nationally for structural change, there remains concern that civic engagement activities have not had their intended transformational effect on institutions – and there is even some conjecture that the movement has stalled, with stakeholders unable to agree on a common platform, vocabulary, and vision.\(^{25}\)

While efforts are being waged to ameliorate the issues within higher education, the grassroots arts and humanities field remains in a deep crisis. As Dudley Cocke documents in his 2011 essay, “The Unreported Arts Recession of 1997,” community-based cultural organizations of any significant scale are in danger of becoming extinct. This may be the biggest single threat to a robust future for this work, and it will be one of the themes of IA’s 2012 national conference, to be held in New York City, October 5-7.

**Author’s Recommendations**

- Create support mechanisms for students to participate in publicly engaged scholarship and community-based artistic practice. For example, provide student debt relief to those who apply their artistic skills and scholarly training to community-identified problems.
- Intentionally develop, over the course of the next 10 years, community-based humanities, arts, and design organizations of significant scale, so that the campus-community partnership proposition can succeed in both developing communities and in transforming higher education.
- Support partnerships between communities and campuses in which STEM and the humanities, arts, and design disciplines collaborate.\(^{26}\)

**CONCLUSION**

During my undergraduate studies as an actor at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, an offbeat course introduced me to applied performance and public humanities. A new avenue of intellectual and creative practice suddenly seemed possible. This occurred just as I was becoming disillusioned with the professional performing arts, mostly because of the elitism that was apparent when examined through the lens of race and class. Within this new community-based, social justice practice, I found myself able to tap and explore
an important part of my consciousness as a member of a family of Holocaust survivors. Feeling the pressure of student debt, it also looked like this new field might offer opportunities for gainful employment.

At the beginning of this article, I asked if there was something important about the humanities, arts, and design overlooked by those arguing that we should place our hopes – and resources – in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It is this: humanities, arts, and design give us the human story in its full complexity, helping us as individuals and as a species understand who we are and where we’ve been. Humanities, arts, and design convey reality and incite imagination and creativity – and so do the sciences. There is no ultimate reason that knowledge stemming from any quarter of the academy and community cannot increase our consciousness and advance human welfare. It is this possibility of achieving a unity of knowledge that I think should give us hope that we can meet the daunting, too-long deferred challenges we now face.
End Notes

1 This partnership is described by DeAnna Cummings in the interview, “Keyword: Sustainability,” in IA’s spring 2011 newsletter.
6 These values are articulated as part of Imagining America’s Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals statement.
7 The Bronx African American History Project is described by Mark Naison in “Bridging Disciplines, Crossing Sectors” in IA’s fall 2010 newsletter. The quote is from page three.
8 David Zonderman, North Carolina State University, is interviewed in “Bridging Disciplines, Crossing Sectors” in IA’s fall 2010 newsletter.
9 The programs of Vanderbilt University’s Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities are described in an interview with Mona Frederick in “IA Turns Ten: Founding Consortium Members Reflect” in IA’s fall 2009 newsletter.
10 California State Polytechnic University-Pomona’s programs are described in an interview with Susan Mulley in “Bridging Disciplines, Crossing Sectors” in IA’s fall 2010 newsletter.
11 University of New Mexico’s programs are described in an interview with Jane Slaughter in “Bridging Disciplines, Crossing Sectors” in IA’s fall 2010 newsletter.
12 The University of California-Santa Barbara’s community-arts and design initiatives on the public housing crisis are described in an interview with Kim Yasuda in “IA Turns Ten: Founding Consortium Members Reflect” in IA’s fall 2009 newsletter.
14 Brown University’s three-year investigation into the University’s historic relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade is documented in IA’s Foreseeable Futures position paper, “Navigating the Past: Brown University and the Voyage of the Slave Ship Sally, 1967-65,” by James T. Campbell.
15 The quote is from page 14 of IA’s Foreseeable Futures position paper, “Transforming America: The University as Public Good,” by Nancy Cantor.
16 The journal’s content will be peer-reviewed by both artists and scholars and feature a broad range of media, including video, audio, and images.
17 The University of Minnesota’s efforts to advance public engagement are described in an interview with Andrew Furco in “Imagining Sustainability: Twin Cities 2011” in IA’s spring 2011 newsletter; the quote is from page 4. Also, please see the University of Minnesota’s Ten-Point Plan for Institutionalizing and Advancing Engagement.
For more information about Syracuse University’s changes to its tenure and promotion policies, see the White Paper on Scholarship in Action authored by Louise Phelps on behalf of the Academic Affairs Committee of the University Senate.

Macalester College’s Urban Faculty Colloquium is described in “Imagining Sustainability: Twin Cities 2011” in IA’s spring 2011 newsletter.

See the “Democratic Engagement White Paper” by John Saltmarsh, Matt Hartley, and Patti Clayton.

See the White Paper on Scholarship in Action authored by Louise Phelps, previously mentioned.

Gregory Jay’s essay, “What (Public) Good are the (Engaged) Humanities?” is a good primer on campus-community partnerships in the public humanities. The quote is on the first page.

Rob Corser’s essay, “Design in the Public Interest – The Dilemma of Professionalism,” describes campus-community partnerships and issues in the field of design.

IA’s Foreseeable Futures position paper, “The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy,” by George J. Sanchez, explores these issues. Furthermore, this is the subject of IA’s collaborative research project, Linking Full Participation, with Columbia Law School’s Center for Institutional and Social Change.

See the “Democratic Engagement White Paper” by John Saltmarsh, Matt Hartley, and Patti Clayton.

Two notable initiatives: Rhode Island School of Design is leading an advocacy effort, research, and educational programs under the banner, STEM to STEAM. The Robeson Group is adding music and arts to science education – a methodology they call TEAMMS – as a strategy for closing the achievement gap.