



2018 FALL
PLANNING LETTER

COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

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In the wake of the survivor impact statements, the resignation of President Simon, and the intense period of institutional transformation we are experiencing at Michigan State University, the College of Arts & Letters (CAL) has committed to looking critically at ourselves, recognizing our failures, and rebuilding the trust that is required of us.

Last spring, students, faculty, and staff in the College of Arts & Letters spent significant time reviewing and revising the policies and procedures that shape the lives of our departments and programs to ensure that we cultivate a culture of trust, accountability, and care. We held town hall meetings, student-centered roundtables, and department reflection days on mentoring, advising, and pedagogies. On April 19, we hosted Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement, through the Transformative Justice Series led by Xhercis Méndez. More than 1,400 heard her speak about sexual abuse and empowerment through empathy.

This work has led us to recognize the need to undertake a period of critical self-reflection intentionally structured around a values-based fall planning process. This fall, all units in the College of Arts & Letters were asked to identify the top core values of the unit and to map these values onto their primary strategic initiatives to ensure that we are putting our values into practice through our activities. They were also asked to articulate how the unit is advancing a culture of shared accountability and trust based on the values conversations that they have undertaken.

This process has led us to identify the follow three core values of the College of Arts & Letters:

- Equity - inclusivity, diversity, social justice, equitable access, accessibility
- Openness - transparency, open process, candor, accountability, open source
- Community - collaboration, collegiality, empathy, respect, connection

In the remainder of this planning letter, we will articulate how we are putting these values into practice through our top initiatives in the College designed to advance the productivity of the faculty, success of our students, and well-being of our staff. We are convinced that the priority areas identified by the Provost can only be effectively promoted if our students, staff, and faculty have a safe and trusting environment in which they can do their very best work. The culture of care we hope to model in the College of Arts & Letters will be a strategic differentiator for us as we seek to recruit and retain diverse and innovative faculty and students.

Here is the word cloud from our values-based planning process across the College of Arts & Letters:



THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

Our top priority as a College is to establish the new Department of African American and African Studies (AAAS). We recognize this as a primary way through which we can live out our core value of equity by recruiting and retaining talented faculty and students of color to the College of Arts & Letters and Michigan State University.

However, for this strategy of recruitment and retention to be successful over the long term, we are embracing the *intellectual substance* of African American and African Studies by building curriculum and supporting an organizational structure that conveys, with clarity and urgency, how important Black and African Studies is to Michigan, from Flint to Muskegon, from Lansing to Detroit, and from the United States to Africa and the broad African Diaspora.

An indication of our shared commitment to transform the institutional culture of the College of Arts & Letters by establishing a Department of African American and African Studies can be found in the support letters from the College Advisory Committee (CAC) and the College of Arts & Letters Department Chairs that accompanied our proposal to the faculty senate to establish the Department. The letter from the CAC put it well:

The College's vision is to shape intentional lives, cultivate creativity, and engage global cultural understanding. A Department of African American and African Studies would contribute significantly to our vision, especially across—but certainly not limited to—the areas of histories; social and cultural criticism; and feminisms, gender, and sexuality studies.

Further, to have a letter of support for a new Department signed unanimously by all of the Chairs is a powerful indication of the broad commitment by the College for this important initiative.

EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION INITIATIVE

If we are going to truly create a culture in which scholars doing innovative interdisciplinary, and intersectional scholarship thrive, significant reform of the Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure process will need to be undertaken. In July 2017, the Center for Interdisciplinarity's Toolbox initiative came out with a Creating Inclusive Excellence Grant report (co-authors: Nicole T. Buchanan, Kristie Dotson, Michael O'Rourke, Marisa A. Rinkus, Isis H. Settles, and Stephanie E. Vasko) based on structured dialogues across Michigan State University that focused on issues of epistemic exclusion in the evaluation of scholarship through the reappointment, promotion, and tenure process.

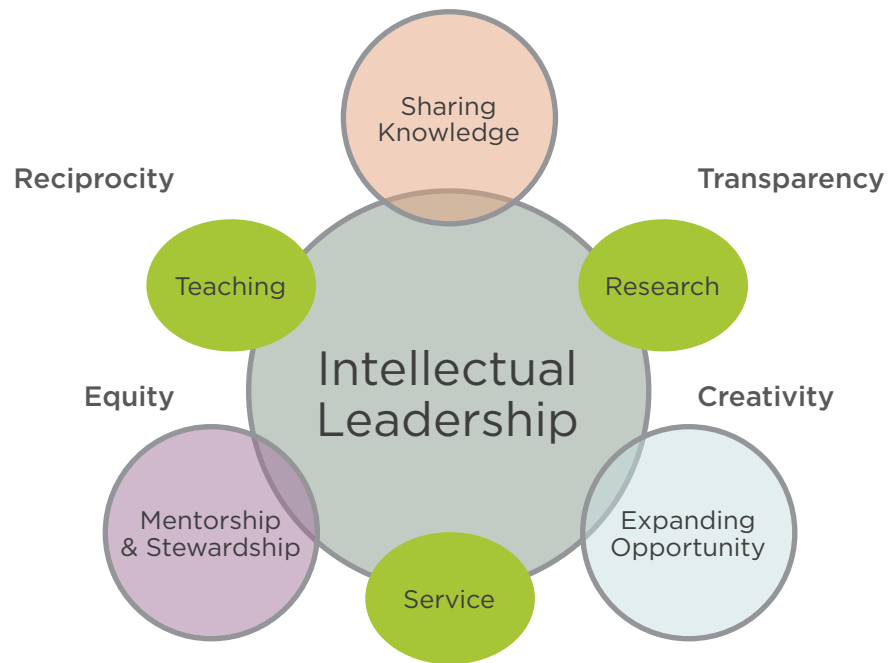
The report articulates the meaning of epistemic exclusion this way:

In academia, EE arises when assessments aimed at producing better scholarship exclude certain types of research, where such devaluation can attach to the research conducted, the researcher, or both the research and the researcher. EE can operate formally through metrics used to evaluate scholarship and informally when the scholarship of certain social groups is not comprehended, appreciated, or recognized.

In order to put our commitments to equity, openness, and community into practice, the College of Arts & Letters intends to adopt the main recommendations of the Toolbox's CIEG report, including their recommendation that the University undertake a reformation of the RPT process so that it "should be holistic and should emphasize faculty development; the process should begin with the offer letter and be reflected by consistent annual review processes that align well with the T&P process; among other specific elements, the value of service should be reconsidered, especially in light of the inequitable service burden that some faculty are expected to bear."

The College is approaching these issues by developing a faculty development approach to RPT. To do this, we are working to create structures and practices that empower our faculty to chart their path of intellectual leadership as they undertake the RPT process. Over the course of a career, intellectual leaders share knowledge and expand opportunity, contributing to greater transparency and accelerating creativity. Intellectual leaders engage in mentorship of others, formally as instructors and informally. They also engage in stewardship of the institutional spaces for learning as a reciprocal dynamic, creating the conditions for greater equity.

Values, Activities, & Outcomes of Intellectual Leadership



The semi-transparent circles in the diagram are the things we should measure and reward. The solid ovals are the means by which we do these things, and they should not be confused with ends. Too often, these means are the only things we measure. A better measure of published scholarship, for instance, would look to evaluate the *benefit* of sharing the knowledge. This is a challenge CAL has taken up in conjunction with a group of other institutions and scholarly organizations in the HumetricsHSS project.

CORE COMMITMENT TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The College has undertaken several initiatives at the undergraduate level to advance our commitment to equitable access and student success. [The Excel Network](#) establishes and supports a holistic approach to experiential learning, career education, student advising, and alumni networking in the College of Arts & Letters to chart successful paths to meaningful careers. Drawing on our new experiential learning requirement, the Excel Network supports our students as they seek to put their core values into practice and chart their own paths to intellectual leadership.

The [Citizen Scholars Program](#), now in its third year, continues to provide open access for any aspiring College of Arts & Letters undergraduate to perform their way into academic excellence and advanced cultural and civic understanding through a combination of course-based and co-curricular requirements to the designation of “Citizen Scholar”. The program prepares students for meaningful careers and leadership roles by providing structured and self-directed paths that help them explore their own interests in diversity, inclusiveness, social justice, and civic service. These citizen scholars access resources to fund an enhanced capstone experience that sets them apart from their peers both through self-knowledge and career preparation.

With these signature programs in place as the infrastructure through which to enrich the undergraduate experience, the College needs to encourage more engagement with and support for the undergraduate mission through incentives that provide more robust rewards for undergraduate teaching and experiential learning. To this end, we will appoint a third Associate Dean in the College to focus on undergraduate education with a mandate to diversify the curriculum, so we can live up to our commitment to equity and on enhancing faculty engagement with the Integrative Arts & Humanities program as we advance our values of access and collaboration.

CULTIVATING COLLABORATIONS

The values-base planning process brought to the fore a deep commitment to creating community through collaboration. Many units are engaged in collaborative efforts within the College and across the University. Still, much needs to be done to create structures and rewards for collaborative work. The Epistemic Exclusion initiative discussed above and the Center for Interdisciplinarity are two ways the College is attempting to create the infrastructure to recognize and reward collaboration. Here we mention three specific initiatives that put our shared commitment to collaboration into practice:

Food@MSU

As we discussed last year, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR), the College of Communication Arts and Sciences (ComArtSci), and the College of Arts & Letters (CAL) are collaborating to advance the research profile of Michigan State University in the holistic study of food. Led by three signature research centers, the Center for Regional Food Systems (CANR), the Health & Risk Communication Center (ComArtSci), the Center for Interdisciplinarity (CAL), this innovative partnership is advancing a vision of engaged, participatory research rooted in the deepest commitments of the land-grant mission.

Media Arts Collaborative

With ComArtSci, the College of Music, and the MSU Libraries we continue to support collaborative projects between the colleges that enrich the undergraduate learning experience and provide faculty opportunities to work together on innovative media arts projects. We are redoubling our efforts to do collaborative fundraising on an expanded vision of the Media Arts Collaborative that would provide infrastructure and resources for an endowed director, faculty collaboration grants, and faculty mentored student-led media arts projects.

Transformative Justice Initiative

With the College of Human Medicine (CHM) and CANR, we are developing a transformative justice approach to addressing issues of relationship violence and sexual misconduct (RVSM) that are trauma-informed and survivor centric. Expanding on the success of the Transformative Justice Speaker Series, the Colleges have partnered to hire Xhercis Méndez, co-founder of the Transformative Justice Lansing Collective, as a consultant to formulate a method to address the conditions that make this violence possible. This partnership aims to establish a leading-edge approach to RVSM that will model best practices for other universities facing these issues.

ARTS INTEGRATED INTO THE MSU RESEARCH MISSION

In anticipation of and in conjunction with the University Arts & Culture strategy process, we have sought to integrate the arts into the heart of the MSU research mission. Our efforts are inspired by a passage from the [2008 Harvard Task Force on the Arts report](#), which recognized that a 21st century research university should:

“... make the arts an integral part of the cognitive life of the university: for along with the sciences and the humanities, the arts—as they are both experienced and practiced—are irreplaceable instruments of knowledge.”

To this end, we have undertaken an open and exciting re-visioning and restructuring process in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design (AAHD) and have developed in the Department of Theatre signature initiatives in entrepreneurship and in the creation of innovative sensory-friendly performances for neurodiverse audiences. These efforts have been aligned with the three core values of equity, openness, and community as indicated, for example, by our Critical Race Studies Artist Residency program in AAHD, and in Theatre, by our *imáGen* program that develops new musicals alongside Broadway artists in partnership with the Wharton Center.

The MFA program in AAHD has been restructured to empower students of diverse backgrounds to identify individualized pathways that focus on themes like Arts, Science, and Technology or Design, Culture, and Identity. The new curriculum will take more intentional advantage of the Department’s place at a major research university and prepare MFA students to become artist-scholars who adeptly connect their individual practices of art and design to contemporary contexts and their histories.

CHALLENGES IN THE COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

The following challenges have been identified through discussions with Department Chairs, Program Directors, and the College Advisory Council.

Trust

The events of the past year have revealed a debilitating culture of distrust in the College of Arts & Letters. We must rebuild trust by cultivating habits, practices, and policies of shared governance and responsibility based on mutual respect. Since January, some of the intentional steps we have taken to nurture a culture of trust in the College include:

- Empowering the College Advisory Committee to be more proactive in their leadership;
- Establishing a College Undergraduate Committee to support our efforts to advance the undergraduate experience as a priority;
- Facilitating retreats with the Chairs that empower them to shape meeting agendas and share in decision making about how resources are deployed;
- Advancing a values-based fall planning process that is beginning to open spaces of more trusting interactions at the unit level.

We have pursued these initiatives with renewed intentionality and commitment the accountability side of the culture of care by holding faculty, staff, and students

accountable for unprofessional behavior. In addition, the hub and spoke model is very entrenched in CAL management culture and faculty governance structures have been quite weak, which has led to silos and challenges in leadership and professional development. We are strengthening faculty governance both at the College and unit levels as well as building new connections across departments, centers, and programs in alignment with our values.

Budget

Garnering resources not only for innovative new initiatives but to advance and enhance the core educational mission of the College continues to be a major challenge. As enrollments increase, budgets tighten, and the incentives around more entrepreneurial activities associated with online learning shift, we are working hard to identify efficiencies and develop new revenue-based initiatives to support the basic writing program, our commitment to integrative studies in arts and humanities, and the holistic liberal arts education for which the College has long provided. A related challenge is the general antipathy toward the arts and humanities in the broader culture of the country, despite the clear preference of employers for graduates with a broad liberal arts education. In addition to the enhancements to undergraduate education mentioned above, we are also developing a more holistic set of indicators of our contribution to the core educational mission of the University. To this end, we have begun to develop reports that look not only at primary and secondary majors, but at minors and student credit hours more generally to better articulate the significant contribution to student success the College is making.

One faculty, different appointment types

Structural inequities continue to bifurcate the faculty and undermine our attempts to create a caring and supportive culture. Increased reliance on underpaid fixed-term faculty to provide core education in writing, the languages, the arts, and the general education curriculum undermine our attempts to establish a culture of respect in which we have one faculty with different but equally important appointment types. Although we have received temporary funding for increased hiring in writing in the wake of the large incoming class, the contingent nature of this funding and the positions we establish with them further erode our efforts to live out our core commitment to equity.