

Executive Summary

Fine and Performing Arts Report Fall 2000

The recommendations of this commission are intended to produce a major cultural transformation at the University of Virginia, enabling the arts to achieve, by 2020, the same level of national prominence as the University's other most recognized centers of excellence. The objective is to enrich the experience of students and faculty, expand the cultural resources for the entire University and surrounding community, and develop the physical environments in which the arts are created and performed.

For students who make the arts their life's work, this new environment will enable them to discover and refine their talents, guided by faculty who are themselves deeply involved in the creative process. For faculty, the University will offer the time, tools, and facilities necessary to produce art and scholarship of the highest order. For Charlottesville and the Commonwealth, strengthening the arts at the University can provide significant economic benefit: The arts play an increasingly significant role in our economy, from entertainment to the Internet-based "new economy" to the economic revitalization of distressed areas.

The commission has proposed a series of five recommendations, as well as the appointment of a University-wide Committee for the Arts. Consisting of faculty and students, this committee will help develop interdisciplinary programs and promote continued and improved communication.

To raise the quality and visibility of the arts at UVa, the commission recommends the following actions:

1. Expand and improve facilities for the arts, providing students and faculty with the tools they need to create outstanding work, including works in digital media and other new technologies. If UVa truly wants to become nationally eminent in the arts, it must make a new statement to the greater arts community. It must improve its substandard arts facilities to bring the arts to the level of other centers of excellence on Grounds—the School of Law, the Darden School, and athletics, for example.
2. Give departments the faculty they need to meet a greater share of student demand for courses in the arts, to collaborate across disciplines, to foster professional development, and to strengthen their programs. Also, give the arts libraries and the University Art Museum the human resources necessary to achieve and sustain excellence. Presently, many students wishing to take courses in the arts are turned away: In the spring semester of 2000, nearly 1,400 students were denied entry into the introductory courses offered in art history, studio art, music, drama, and creative writing. We need to develop collaboration across disciplines, create more guest artist programs, and fund more endowed professorships in the arts.

3. In order to aggressively recruit students with exceptional artistic talent, give greater weight to artistic ability in the admissions process. Also, acquire and develop the means to recruit superb graduate students.
4. Establish an undergraduate program in dance; launch the Digital Arts Initiative; create new graduate programs that will enrich the study, performance, and creation of the arts at the University; and establish new Centers of Excellence in the School of Architecture. One of the University's most glaring deficiencies is the lack of a dance program. Currently more than 350 students are studying dance in makeshift spaces without faculty instruction. For digital arts, the commission proposes a mix of research and courses with creative, experiential, perceptual, and scientific elements that draw on specializations within a variety of disciplines.
5. Develop new and effective communications vehicles to promote the University's arts programs to the community, to peer institutions, to alumni and friends, to current and potential donors, and to prospective students, especially in the Commonwealth. New staff and new publications (including a Website) are presently expanding promotional efforts in the arts. The commission also recommends a new publication and collateral materials for recruiting students.