

Digest #1 Context & Goals for a2ru@10

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Thank you for coming to Ann Arbor this June 9-11 for **a2ru@10: What's Next for Arts Integration**. This letter is the first in a series of digests to help prepare you for the event.

Here's a summary of what's in Digest #1:

- **Common Framework:** Link to [working definitions for arts & arts integration](#)
  - *It will be essential to have a common frame of reference to anchor discussions for this gathering.*
- **History and Context for a2ru@10**
  - *A2ru was founded as a result of a 2011 "Michigan Meeting" with the theme, "The Role of Art and Art Making in the Research University."*
  - *Brief synopsis of a2ru's first decade.*
- **Goals of the Convening**
  - *What we wish to accomplish during the conversations, designed working sessions, and lightning talks.*
- **Possible Outcomes**
  - *A list of examples of the kinds of outcomes we anticipate at the end of the convening.*
- **Who Will I Work with There?**
  - *A summary of partners and allies coming to a2ru@10.*
- **Contacts**
  - *Who to reach out to with programming and logistics questions.*
- **Brief essay: "How Re-Integrating the Arts Can Save a World in Crisis"**
  - *An argument for why arts integration is crucial. "[T]o meet the holistic challenges we face, we need methods that marshal collective knowledge and center the assets of artistic knowledge. An important first step is to meet these omni crises with integrated disciplinary collaboration, aided by cross-sector partnerships."*
- **List of Upcoming Digests**

## Common Framework

A later digest will focus on terms, but for now, please reference our [working definitions for arts, arts-integration](#), etc.

## History and Context for a2ru@10

In 2011, the University of Michigan hosted a convening that resulted in the founding of a2ru: “[The Role of Art and Art-making in the Research University](#).” The a2ru network spent the next decade launching several research projects and publications; creating three websites and dozens of webinars and workshops; and engaging people through eight student summits, nine national conferences, and countless conversations. Most importantly, however, the existence of a2ru created a community for students, faculty, staff, and administrators who were formerly on their own, but now a part of a community that wanted to work across the disciplines to explore and showcase the true potential of the arts.

Since 2011, we have seen more integrative centers open, more internal grant programs for collaborative, arts-integrative research, more research deans in arts schools, more cabinet-level arts leaders, and more campus-wide arts initiatives. A large research project funded by the Mellon foundation helped a2ru define existing baseline practices for arts integration, and our work with partners has helped us refine and improve these practices.

We see this convening not as a bookend to the initial Michigan meeting, but as a check-in moment. Starting a2ru with 27 initial partners was a big lift. Each of those research universities invested in the future of the arts fully integrated into higher education. As we enter a2ru’s second decade, we recognize the progress we’ve made and we see the continued need to be intentional for a strong arts field in higher education. With this intentional work across sectors, we can secure support for creative practice and research.

We are fortunate to have a few of the people from the original meeting at this anniversary meeting, and we look forward to hearing their valuable insights regarding the changes they have seen in the arts in higher education as well as in a2ru, and what advice they have for where we should next focus our energies. For more on the background of a2ru, visit the “[Our Story](#)” section of a2ru.org.

**See more from the original convening, “Art and Art-Making in the Research University”:**

\*Keynotes included “[What Researchers and Artists Actually Do](#)” from previous Mellon foundation president, Don Michael Radell, Princeton President Shirley Tilghman. “[Universities in the Service of the Imagination](#)” and Nancy Cantor, president of Syracuse University on “[Inciting Insight: Situating the Arts in Higher Education](#).”

Coverage:

[https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/arts/mellon-foundation-president-asserts-1-culture-not-2?cid2=gen\\_login\\_refresh&cid=gen\\_sign\\_in](https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/arts/mellon-foundation-president-asserts-1-culture-not-2?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in)

<https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/arts/princetons-tilghman-calls-us-crucial-to-the-arts>

<https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/arts/syracuse-president-urges-reimagining-of-arts-role-in-colleges>

**What are the goals of a2ru@10?**

2022 is a2ru’s tenth anniversary and we have important priorities to put in place for the future of arts integration.

We are going to address questions of why artists in higher education (and in other sectors, such as industry) are undervalued and often excluded from the research enterprise, and workshop ways that this can be remedied.

*What’s different from a2ru’s first decade?*

The field of arts integration has grown and a2ru has been an essential part of defining our space in this re-emerging field. We have provided baseline research, amplified models, and established definitions and practices. We have also been responsive to the scope of the field and its needs. Last year, a2ru expanded its membership beyond R1s and R2s. a2ru started with research universities because it was founded in that context— and integrating the arts in research universities can be extraordinarily difficult because the arts are largely segregated from the main research enterprise. But the exchange with other types of institutions was needed. We welcomed independent art and design schools to work directly with arts schools in larger systems, and we welcomed community colleges and liberal arts institutions because many of

our conference attendees were from places other than research universities and we know they are large contributors to and pioneers in the field of arts integration. We also welcomed independent artists and individuals who wanted access to a2ru, those who are in the field of arts integration but not affiliated with a current member institution or who work independently. We need all of these contributors to make a difference.

**Goals:**

- Strategize how to support artists, the arts and arts integration in higher education in the next decade, particularly in the areas of defining artistic research, funding infrastructures, equitable inclusion for artists cross-sector;
- Strategize how to better leverage a2ru's position in a national context of the urgency for arts practice and research for broad social issues of climate change, systemic racism, political polarization;
- Welcome strategic partners more intentionally to build a stronger field for arts integration, building on a2ru's baseline knowledge;
- Surface common interests between a2ru legacy stakeholders and allies;
- Raise awareness of a2ru's accomplishments in its first decade and build network models to continue to recommend policy and practice changes to strengthen the field for arts integration.

**Possible Outcomes:**

- Calls for action - address funding infrastructure available for artists in higher education
- Calls for commitments - "Beyond the building" adopt and adapt campus-wide plans for arts integration and arts support
- An articulation of the unique power of the arts for social cohesion, climate justice, and to advance equity
- Scaled discussions and actions on interdisciplinary and arts-integrated approaches to climate change, systemic racism, poverty, public health, and political polarization.
- Build and sustain cross-sector partnerships to center the arts in research and practice in higher education, industry, private NGOs, and civil and government organizations;
- A recalibrated strategy and refined existing practices for where a2ru can have the greatest impact for the field of arts integration in the near, middle, and long-term

### **Who will I work with there?**

These working meetings will have representatives from [a2ru member institutions](#)—administrators, students, staff, and faculty—as well as allies from industry, public and private funders, and nonprofits, such as American Association of Universities, Leonardo/ISAST, WolfBrown, Ernst & Young, Henry Luce Foundation, Major League Baseball, National Endowment for the Arts, the National Science Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control, United States Artists, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The next digest will have biographical information and roles.

### **Contacts**

Please feel free to reach out to Maryrose Flanigan ([flanigam@umich.edu](mailto:flanigam@umich.edu)) about any programming questions and Charisse Willis ([a2ruconnect@umich.edu](mailto:a2ruconnect@umich.edu)) for logistics. We are excited to welcome you to Ann Arbor!

**A brief essay by a2ru leadership  
“How Re-Integrating the Arts Can Save a World in Crisis”**

The crisis of COVID-19 shook our society, and made our previous complacency impossible. The fault lines in our already unstable systems were exposed—bitter divisions over questions of racial equity, the fragility of our ecosystem, and chatter on runaway social networks unmoored from scientific knowledge—and it quickly became evident that we would not return to the status quo. The cascading crises we face are complex, interdependent, and systemic, and our solutions must reflect this complexity. Our educational systems are divided into disciplines with few opportunities in place for scholars and researchers to inform each other’s discoveries, an exchange that is essential to finding solutions that transcend the current approach.

As researchers and educators, we need to shift the current paradigm for problem solving, a paradigm with shallow roots anchored in specialization that results in divided, diffuse, and partial solutions. To meet the holistic challenges we face, we need methods that marshal collective knowledge and center the assets of artistic knowledge. An important first step is to meet these omni crises with integrated disciplinary collaboration, aided by cross-sector partnerships.

In a systematized, dialed-in, and coordinated effort, the arts can and must play important restorative and collaborative roles that will help generate resilience at the individual, organizational, and community levels. The arts—integrated as an equal partner—are essential to not miss this opportunity to rebuild.

But how do we re-integrate the disciplines, and centralize artistic methods that have been all but banished from many curricula? Fortunately, from students to university leadership, most people are in favor of integrated knowledge and acknowledge the importance of the arts. But there are significant barriers. The material and structural support for the arts simply isn’t there and the necessary conditions no longer exist for artistic knowledge to thrive. In fact, access to the arts was greatly reduced during the pandemic and, as a result, arts workers suffered dramatically. An already fragile system collapsed, as we saw the unemployment in these workers outstrip all other areas except for the hospitality industry.

The arts were an assumed part of an education until the specialization and splintering of education into disciplines in the early 19th century. Humans have accelerated technical improvements with the will to benefit society but lost holistic approaches to research and development; so ethical, spiritual, and moral considerations were left separated, and these conditions left us vulnerable to unintended consequences. Increasingly, our knowledge is fragmented and lacks context. Most people worldwide never see the articles and visual media

pieces published by science journalists, and instead, often receive information from politically motivated social media feeds and other equally untrustworthy outlets. Artists play powerful roles in piercing through the barrier of misinformation and lack of trust.

**The arts are a vehicle for engagement and collective action.** With their unique ability to help people synthesize both human intellect and emotion, the arts mark our most important and otherwise unspeakable moments collectively and individually, capturing the zeitgeist of the moment to spur action. They are a powerful tool for communication and community organizing. According to our youngest inaugural poet, Amanda Gorman, “When America seeks to consecrate its ideals, it does so through poetry...it is no coincidence that we see a poem at the base of the Statue of Liberty as opposed to a scientific formula or even a prosaic paragraph...Poetry is the language and rhetoric of the people....we can co-opt it. What’s more, we get to use those words to realize our thoughts and transform those thoughts into action.” With this insight, Gorman outlines how the arts have a unique quality to define and galvanize movements toward justice and social cohesion. And she also touches on the arts as a deep resource for resilience in difficult times--as a common foundation from which to rebuild.

**Artistic knowledge and practice provide powerful tools to tackle systemic issues.**

Consider a survey with multiple choice questions. Just in writing the question, the survey-writer limits the ways in which a person can answer. Open-ended questions, though more difficult to organize and interpret, allow the survey-taker to share answers the survey-writer may not have considered. Art functions similarly. As artists draw on their perspectives and that which makes them unique; their art moves beyond the realm of the known. When working within university and industry settings, artists work to classify previously unnamed phenomena to enable us to consider previously unincorporated data. The power of these solutions is fully embodied when artistic and scientific methodologies are working in concert with one another. There are many different types of research and being able to reset an approach to any type of problem can accelerate and reinvigorate the work.

**The arts are an on-ramp to collective solutions.** For all the jargon that artistic practitioners have produced as part of an academic discipline, it is still an ancient form of inquiry. Long before Steve Jobs insisted on design principles in his development of Apple products, our greatest, creative thinking through time has leveraged the arts as a universal language. Cave art appeared on each continent. The 70,000 year-old geometric engravings on pieces of Ochre in the Blombos Caves in southern Africa indicate one of the earliest examples of artistic research. Linguists have noted the cognitive development of language evident in this highly symbolic art. Because of their universality, the arts are inclusive and invite a variety of diverse perspectives.

Artistic methodology processes and produces new knowledge, on both collective and individual levels.

The largest barriers to transdisciplinary research, practice, and teaching in university culture are structural. Siloed financial structures in different schools and colleges serve the need for deep disciplinary engagement but create a competitive, rather than collaborative, environment. There are other divisive factors on campus, such as discipline-specific terminology that takes time to work through to develop a mutual understanding of ideas and concepts. There are geographical barriers: arts units and performing arts centers and museums are often separated or distant on campuses, providing a physical barrier to collaboration. Artistic practice is not codified into the research infrastructure in the modern university and the federal and foundation funders reflect this lack. Most people can understand art as a translator of scientific concepts or to aestheticize a project, but not its intrinsic value. This segregation of the arts is a lost opportunity with major consequences. These factors ensure artistic research and methodologies take a back seat to STEM in higher education and other sectors and discourage disciplinary integration.

Based on the knowledge gathered from the network, we call on champions for arts integration from all sectors including academic, government, private, and industry leaders to enable a sea change in how the artists are funded, perceived, and valued in our society. The arts should be better integrated into the experiences and curriculum in our colleges and universities. Hiring managers should consider the transferability of artistic training when hiring for positions, municipalities need to include artists on planning teams. The National Science Foundation should revisit its “broader impacts” criterion to include arts projects more explicitly beyond instrumentalization, and the National Institute of Health should consider AAMC’s leadership in centering the arts in physician training. Manufacturers must integrate artistic methodologies for research and development. Congress must stop treating the nation’s arts endowment as an expendable agency and start taking seriously how much art matters to the character of our country.

The founders of a2ru recognized the powerful, untapped potential of the arts. But like everything, the arts are more clearly seen in relief. They are no more a magic bullet to increase excellence and productivity than the hyper focus on STEM has been in the past two decades. It is up to us to ensure the support for transformative, transdisciplinary solutions with the arts as equal partners from the start.

In higher education, government, and industry, the siloed structures of disciplines and the sidelining of arts practice leave us, as a society, unable to coordinate a fully successful response to the upended reality we face post-COVID-19. It’s time to come together across



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sectors and disciplines to organize a cohesive response to the intractable problems that plague us such as novel viruses, racism, radicalization, hunger, and damage to the earth. Let's reassess how the arts can be central to recovery and the rebirth of a more just and humane world. Allied networks like a2ru, designed and determined to work across differences, can lead us there.

—a2ru

*This is a summary of a series of essays by a2ru's leadership on the urgency of transdisciplinary collaboration, starting with the arts in all sectors. Visit [a2ru.org](http://a2ru.org) to join the conversation.*

References: (Gorman quote from Trevor Noah interview January 28, 2021)

**Coming Up:**

Digest #2 Roles and Relevance—attendees and biographical information

Digest #3 Agenda Overview

Digest #4 Overview of a2ru research; terms & definitions

Digest #5 Final program and logistics