

**Assessing our Exchange:  
An Examination of Community Engagement at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music**

There is little doubt that the phrase “community engagement” sums up a defining trend in the current field of higher education. In logging onto the University of Georgia’s College of Education website, the home page headline jumps out in bold letters: “Outreach, Engagement, and Service.” These are now understood by liberal arts institutions as lifelong values that must be imparted to students, and even the hiring of teachers is now somewhat predicated on their experience in such matters. But what exactly does community engagement look like, and how is it accomplished, particularly for a school of music? What are the different approaches taken by Hugh Hodgson School of Music (HHSOM) here at the University of Georgia (UGA), and how comparatively effective are they? What does it mean for a university music school to be truly “engaged” with the surrounding community?

In 2010, UGA received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, a designation awarded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and administered by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE). Their website defines community engagement as such: “Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity...to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated engaged

citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.”<sup>1</sup>

As the ideal of community engagement continues to gain traction as a strong modern paradigm of higher education, there is need for an honest assessment of the goals, methods, and philosophies being espoused at the highest levels of planning and implementation. To be engaged with community is to be engaged with the needs of the present day; this is most certainly a necessity for the fledgling musician searching for a career path in the midst of a steadily evolving industry and social dynamic. Students of music have just as much opportunity to affect positive change in the surrounding community as students of other majors—especially since “community enrichment” might as well be part of our job description.

For a long term commitment to engagement within a higher educational institution, it is necessary to establish institutes within the framework of the university infrastructure. This means drafting a mission statement, devising a structure, hiring staff, creating partnerships, and serving research purposes for the university. All of these can be rather daunting tasks, requiring strong will and resources to come to fruition.

For the purposes of our discussion we will examine two such institutes that are directly connected to HHSOM: first, the Community Music School (CMS), a program offering music instruction to neighborhood children and seniors; and the arts initiative Ideas for Creative Exploration (ICE), a program that employs six graduate arts students yearly as research assistants. Following an examination of each institute’s recent activities, along with the testimonies of their respective directors, we shall evaluate each institute according to the rubric laid out in the Carnegie Foundation’s definition:

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<sup>1</sup> “Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.” New England Resource Center for Higher Education, 2015.  
[http://nerche.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=341&Itemid=92](http://nerche.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=341&Itemid=92) (accessed 3/4/2016)

1. Collaboration between university and community for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.
2. Enrichment of scholarship, research, and creative activity.
3. Enhancement of curriculum, teaching and learning.
4. Preparation of educated, engaged citizens.
5. Strengthening of democratic values and civic responsibility.
6. Addressing of critical societal issues.
7. Contribution to the public good.

### **The Community Music School**

The CMS Mission Statement reads: "The UGA Community Music School is an outreach program of the Hugh Hodgson School of Music, designed to bring musical instruction to community members of all ages in and around the Athens area. The arts are an indispensable need not only for the education of children but also for the enrichment and quality of life of adults. The program welcomes all types of students - regardless of age or ability level. A member of the National Guild of Community Arts Education, the UGA Community Music School shares with other guild schools the mission of providing quality instruction in the arts to all who seek it."<sup>2</sup>

This mission statement clearly identifies outreach and enrichment as specific goals for the organization. According to Director Kristin Jutras, the CMS has been in existence for between 30 and 40 years, and began as a Suzuki instructional program, employing only established professionals in the field. At some point in the mid-nineties, the program was taken

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<sup>2</sup> "Welcome to the UGA Community Music School." UGA, Hugh Hodgson School of Music, Community Music School. <http://ugacms.uga.edu> (accessed 4/28/16)

over by graduate students, the professionals left, and the program began to move in a different direction, providing opportunities for SOM students to gain teaching experience. Eventually CMS began to be used as a means of funding graduate teaching assistantships, as well as a way for students to earn credits. Jutras, herself a Suzuki specialist, was hired to take over the program in 2006, and during that time it has moved from serving around 60 students to now serving in the 300-400 range yearly, drawing mostly upon children under 12 and adult seniors (through partnership with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, a program administered by the College of Education, and New Horizons International Music Association, a program for seniors originally started by Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY).

By contrast to the various partnerships that have formed regarding the pool of students from the senior community, CMS has not been as successful at establishing partnerships within local school systems. A separate SOM program called The String Project is listed on the website as a branch of CMS, but functions independently, co-administered by Dr. Skip Taylor and Ruth Monson. The String Project has established partnerships within the Athens-Clarke County school district, as well as with Athens Boys and Girls Club and AthFest Educates, a 501(c)(3) supporting arts education for children in the greater Athens area. Scholarships and other forms of assistance are made available for low-income families.

Yet, Jutras sees the relationship between CMS and the community as one primarily sustained through word-of-mouth and familial loyalty. “As far as reaching the community, I think we are one of the best kept secrets... because yes, a whole bunch of people know about us, and the people that come and enroll are generally very loyal, and once they’ve taken lessons, even if they quit, I will often hear from them two or three years later, or hear from somebody who knows them, and I will say ‘oh yeah, I remember they were enrolled before...’ So they’re still

happy with their experience even though they've stopped, but there's a lot of people in the community who still have no idea we exist. I still hear that all the time.”<sup>3</sup> She goes on to say that most efforts to advertise the program beyond the returning families have yielded poor results, and also that the program is at peak capacity as it now stands. CMS uses the Hugh Hodgson School of Music’s practice rooms as their teaching classrooms, and further expansion of the program would eventually create conflict with the SOM students who depend heavily on those rooms for their own degree-required practice time.

Measuring by the revenue generated and the benefit for SOM students, CMS is a successful program which no longer needs to justify its continued existence. Certainly the ongoing relationship with hundreds of families also constitutes a form of community outreach, even without the partnerships that have been cultivated by The String Project, and as such merits recognition as one of the faces of successful community engagement. At this point we shall move on to our second example, more directly related to my own experience at UGA, and providing us with a slightly different representation.

### **Ideas for Creative Exploration**

The ICE Mission Statement reads: “Ideas for Creative Exploration (ICE) is a catalyst for innovative, interdisciplinary creative projects, advanced research and critical discourse in the arts, and for creative applications of technologies, concepts, and practices found across disciplines. It is a collaborative network of faculty, students, and community members from all disciplines of the visual and performing arts in addition to other disciplines in the humanities and

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<sup>3</sup> From an interview with Kristin Jutras, conducted at the CMS office on 4/20/16.

sciences. ICE enables all stages of creative activity, from concept and team formation through production, documentation, and dissemination of research.”<sup>4</sup>

I began working for ICE in the fall of 2014, my first semester at UGA, as a research assistant. Although the language of the mission statement does not specifically address community engagement as a goal, the phrase “collaborative network of faculty, students, and community members from all disciplines” certainly alludes to that engagement as a hallmark of ICE’s activities, and in fact one of the reasons I was selected for my assistantship had to do with my own prior experience with community enrichment projects; I have been previously involved with the founding of three nonprofits, including a charter school. “We view outreach and CE as a mechanism to support innovative research,” says ICE Artistic Director Mark Callahan. “So we don’t do it for the end goal of engagement or outreach, but we do it because engagement or outreach, we believe, is a path towards innovation...that having these kind of diverse exchanges of methods and ideologies, worldview, audiences, is that kind of productive mixing that results in new ideas. And I think that is very distinct from other institutions where outreach is part of a core service aspect of their mission.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the most personally rewarding projects I have been involved with in my time at ICE is the Dada Centennial, an event for which I served as Artistic Director, which occurred in February of 2016. This event was conceived as a 100th anniversary celebration of the birth of the Dada art movement, which began in 1916 in Zurich with a group of artists holding soirees at the Cabaret Voltaire. Dr. Jed Rasula, the English department head at UGA, recently published a book about the history of Dada, *Destruction was my Beatrice*, and conceived of the Dada Centennial with ICE Artistic Director Mark Callahan. The Centennial ended up as three nights of

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<sup>4</sup> “Ideas for Creative Exploration: an interdisciplinary initiative for advanced research in the arts at the University of Georgia.” <http://ice.uga.edu> (accessed 4/28/16)

<sup>5</sup> From an interview with Mark Callahan, conducted in the ICE office on 4/21/16.

programming, including one night devoted to reenactment of original sketches, poems, and music from 1916, one night fully devoted to avant garde music of the 1960s, and a final night devoted to new experimental works by musicians, poets, and playwrights. The complete event was a collaboration between UGA professors, students, local artists, and hired professionals.

The Centennial took place at two different downtown Athens venues, the Flicker Theater & Bar (nights 1 and 3) and the Morton Theatre (night 2). The concert event at the Morton had a \$15 admission price in order to cover the cost of hiring the musical acts (Heather McIntosh and the Flicker Orchestra, and the Sun Ra Arkestra), but the nights at Flicker were free and open to the public, and every night of the Centennial was spectacularly attended. This was the fascinating part for me as a newcomer to Athens, for besides the professors and students from UGA, the audience was largely made up of local artists; this indicated a well-established relationship between ICE and the bohemian community for which Athens is well known.

Callahan characterizes this relationship as such: “What made the Dada Centennial click, in terms of the community talent that came forward and were willing to participate largely through total volunteerism—I would frame that as a kind of social capital exchange. Pierre Bordeaux is a theorist who has this social capital theory. There are different ways to measure your value, power, influence in society...the social class you’re born into, or economic class as you gain wealth, political power, et cetera...but there’s also this idea of social capital which is built through things like personal connection, trust, relationships...through a series of related projects, we now have a large fund of social capital. I think something that gets glossed over or people miss it, is that to have real sustained engagement, it takes many years of building up and creating infrastructure—identifying key people who will be there, and that can all be theorized as social capital.”

This social capital which Callahan refers to is part of a 14-year track record that he and the grad assistants have established by way of organizing discrete events and projects with

local artists and musicians. It began back in 2002 with a CD documentation of the local music scene called *Scenes from the X-Ray Cafe*, named for a downtown business that, for a time, served as a venue for evenings of experimental music and art. A later successful project was the AUX Experimental Arts Festival, which positioned national acts next to local unknowns, and everyone doing something unique and daring. Contributors and collaborators included Jeff Mangum and Joe Silva, producer of the radio show *Just Off the Radar*. ICE also released two CDs of recordings under the banner of AUX, and ICE alumnus Kai Riedl used his experiences with AUX to create the Slingshot Festival, "...a festival in **Athens, GA** hosting 40+ national, international and local **Musical** acts, emerging international **Visual Artists** working in sound, video and installation, a **Tech Conference** with presentations from the nation's leading innovators on a range of technological concentrations, **Film Screenings** of documentaries, narrative films and experimental art films, plus lots of laughs on our annual sold out **Comedy Night**."<sup>6</sup> Slingshot does retain some of the avant garde flavor of AUX, but is generally more mainstream.

Callahan sees the Dada Centennial as springing from these previous projects, which gave many established artists the opportunity to do something for themselves rather than to satisfy the demands of the industry. "For me, when it comes down to it, it has been the unqualified peak, in one experience, stress, adrenaline, pride, entertainment, legitimately challenging stuff that lets me rethink my perspective on what is art—those fundamental kind of experiences, that's the real payoff. Different people might frame it in different ways, but that's what's happening."

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>6</sup> "What is Slingshot?" <http://slingshotathens.com/news/> (accessed 5/2/16)

David Weerts and Lorilee Sandmann, in their article “Community Engagement and Boundary-Spanning Roles at Research Universities, wrote: “Specifically, service and outreach are typically conceived as *one-way* approaches to delivering knowledge and service to the public, whereas engagement emphasizes a *two-way* approach in which institutions and community partners collaborate to develop and apply knowledge to address societal needs.”<sup>7</sup> This distinction is drawn directly from the Carnegie Foundation’s working definition of community engagement, from which we drew our criteria at the outset of this discussion. Let us now revisit that original list and ponder the two examples we have examined here.

**1. Collaboration between university and community for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.** The activities of ICE easily satisfy this caveat, whereas in the case of CMS it is debatable. Knowledge is only flowing in one direction, in exchange for financial renumeration. It is not exactly “partnership and reciprocity.”

**2. Enrichment of scholarship, research, and creative activity.** Both ICE and CMS certainly contribute to the enrichment of creative activity, but with scholarship and research, once again we can only declare ICE successful with certainty.

**3. Enhancement of curriculum, teaching and learning.** ICE currently provides this sort of enhancement directly to the graduate assistants working there, and perhaps (it can be argued) to students who participate in ICE activities such as the funding of interdisciplinary projects or public dialogues with arts professionals. With CMS there is little doubt that this enhancement reaches both those who go there to learn and those employed there as teachers.

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<sup>7</sup> Weerts, David J., and Lorilee R. Sandmann. 2010. “Community Engagement and Boundary-Spanning Roles at Research Universities”. *The Journal of Higher Education* 81 (6). Ohio State University Press: 632–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40929570> (accessed 3/4/2016)

**4. Preparation of educated, engaged citizens.** In taking the use of the word “engaged” to mean a truly *two-way* exchange, it also appears that ICE fits the bill somewhat better here as well.

**5. Strengthening of democratic values and civic responsibility.** This is perhaps harder to evaluate, in both cases. If “civic responsibility” can be seen as synonymous with “contributing to the public good,” then I believe that both organizations qualify. As for “strengthening democratic values,” I’m not certain it would be applicable in either case.

**6. Addressing of critical societal issues.** This depends on how we would define “critical.” I would guess the implication here has to do with health and livelihood, on an individual or collective scale, and whether any arts activities fall under such a banner would undoubtedly be the source of lively debate.

**7. Contribution to the public good.** As stated previously, I believe both institutes make an important contribution.

It is certainly not my intention to belittle the fine work of CMS, which shall always serve an important function for UGA students and the community children and seniors whose lives it enriches. But it is clear that our understanding of what “community engagement” or “outreach” means has undergone evolution and transformation since the days in which the CMS mission statement was crafted. As we move into the future, our old approaches require evaluation and assessment, and the fashioning of new endeavors requires creativity and innovation to suit the demands of our hard-won enlightenment. May our successes not go unrecognized.

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