

## **Why Arts**

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When asked about the value of the arts, and why teaching the arts is an essential part of a university's mission, one way to answer is to ask what the world would be like without them: a world in which there were no movies, no literature, no music, no paintings or sculpture, no plays; a world in which there was no Monet or manga, no Da Vinci or Da Vinci Code or Damien Hirst, no Shakespeare or 24 or Mad Men or Mamet, no Beethoven or Beatles, no Harry Potter or Batman, no Song of Songs or Emily Dickinson or Bob Dylan, no Parthenon or Disney Hall, no Washington Monument or Lincoln Memorial. It would be, literally, a world devoid of imagination.

Medical schools and the sciences seem obvious in their more quantifiable, practical relevance to our lives--but what is the point of our lives without those very fields of endeavor that give us our sense of purpose, pleasure and meaning in life? Science is the pursuit of what we can know, but what do we actually know without also studying those fields that explore why knowledge even matters--the fields and pursuits that define our humanity and our culture? A child's first instinct is not to count, but to communicate. The arts are the expression of that first instinct, and are as relevant to our well-being as any other field.

Why do they belong in a university? Because artists and writers and musicians don't work in a vacuum; they need to know the cultural and historical context of their work in order to build on what's come before, and they need expert practitioners to help guide and refine and mentor them as they find their own visions, to teach them techniques both new and old so they can master their craft, which underpins the ability to create. In almost no age before this one has this even been a question in any society. From the first cave dwellers to the Egyptians and Greeks down to the WPA, the essential necessity of art and artistic instruction has been recognized as central to any society, and to any educational system. The inventors of democracy itself build their polis and organized their civic life around the theater and the acropolis. Today, movies, music, TV and books--even museums, with their enormously increased attendance--are not just entertainment, they are the currency of our daily conversations and obsessions. How is it not obvious that these are central to our lives? In fact, everything we understand, and how we live our lives day by day, are defined by the artistic narratives and iconography that are so pervasive that, like the air we breathe or the water we drink--practically invisible--they are taken for granted until we're deprived of them. Then it becomes blindingly obvious how important they are.

How we see the narratives of our lives, what religious beliefs we hold, what poetry or chords evoke our deepest emotions, what imagery and spaces define our perceptions of our world, from the Bible or Koran to Hamlet to Beethoven's Fifth to the Mona Lisa to the houses we live in and the art and literature we put in those houses and into our imaginations, the arts and the teaching of the arts are not only equal in importance to any other fields of learning, but actually create the context in which those fields have

meaning. And let's look at the practical aspect: as the latest Otis report illustrates, the creative industries are arguably the largest sector of the economy in southern California. Should those jobs, from video game artists to theater professionals to writers of all stripes to musicians and performers, should all those jobs and the people who need to be educated to fill them become dependent on private colleges? What does that say about public education, about our role in promoting diversity, opportunity, and diversity of opportunity?