

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# THE CURRICULUM PROJECT REPORT: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

---

by Arlene Goldbard

### CURRICULUM PROJECT CORE TEAM AND ADVISORS

**Ludovic Blain III** (Advisor), Director, Project Spotlight at the Center for Social Inclusion. His website address is [www.ludovicspeaks.com](http://www.ludovicspeaks.com).

**Dudley Cocke** (Lead Investigator) is a stage director, writer, media producer and the Artistic Director of Roadside Theater, a wing of Kentucky's Appalshop. His writing can be found online at [www.roadside.org](http://www.roadside.org).

**Jan Cohen-Cruz** (Lead Investigator), author and professor, is Director of Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life ([www.imaginingamerica.org](http://www.imaginingamerica.org)), a national consortium of colleges and universities committed to public scholarship in the arts, humanities and design.

**Arlene Goldbard** (Lead Investigator) is a writer and consultant whose focus is the intersection of culture, politics and spirituality. Her blog and other writings may be downloaded from [www.arlenegoldbard.com](http://www.arlenegoldbard.com).

**Jamie Haft** (Advisor and Administrator) recently graduated from a community cultural development program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She serves as Program Coordinator at Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life ([www.imaginingamerica.org](http://www.imaginingamerica.org)) in Syracuse, New York.

**Sonia BasSheva Mañjon, Ph.D.** (Advisor) is Vice-President for Diversity and Strategic Partnerships at Wesleyan University ([www.wesleyan.edu](http://www.wesleyan.edu)) in Middletown, Connecticut.

Download the full report from [www.curriculumproject.net/](http://www.curriculumproject.net/)

Sponsored by Imagining America:  
Artists and Scholars in Public Life



2008

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The Curriculum Project's originators undertook this study in recognition of a unique moment of opportunity for the community cultural development (CCD) field: for the artists, educators and organizers whose work is to collaborate with other community members to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media, while building the capacity for social action and contributing to social change.

All signs point toward a ripening field:

- new writing and documentation are attracting new attention;
- universities across the U.S. are creating scores of individual courses, certificates and degree programs;
- unprecedented numbers of students are matriculating in these programs; and
- social-justice activists are collaborating more and more with artists and cultural organizers to bring cultural awareness into their efforts.

The great news is that many smart, passionate CCD thinkers and practitioners are creating new ventures in higher-education settings, are eager to talk about their aspirations and circumstances, eager to learn from each other and make their own work meet the highest possible standards. From community artists' perspectives, the concerns are that higher education's concepts of knowledge creation may drive out community knowledge, weakening practice; that a field that has always been under-resourced may not receive the administrative and material support needed to secure a meaningful place in academia; and that without resources it cannot garner attention and respect for its values, methods and accomplishments so that they can be taught without undue compromise or distortion. This report—focusing on first-person testimonies from educators, community artists and friends of the field gathered through 28 confidential interviews and 231 online survey responses—is intended as a kind of decentralized conversation that can help to advance the field.

The narrowest view of community cultural development is that it is something meaningful for artists to do—and they can bring their social consciences along when they do it. CCD education creates meaningful job prospects for graduates to put their creative abilities to work for social benefit in the classroom, in social institutions, in community organizations and in businesses. With a wider perspective, there are even bigger benefits to be gained: the skills CCD practitioners prize—keen perception, relationship-building, flexibility, improvisation, creative problem-solving—are more and more the skills needed to survive and prosper in contemporary society, certainly to address social problems and opportunities. As educators grapple with the changing nature of knowledge and work, there has been much discussion of reinventing the university for a globalized world. This conversation often takes place within a market-oriented framework, but the challenges of living together, of advancing the public good and of awakening creativity in the service of civil society are even more immediate and pervasive, and CCD has a wealth of assets to offer in service of that task.

**AIMS AND IDEALS:** The Curriculum Project was premised on the conviction that excellent CCD programs in higher education depend on three key elements, a balance of community engagement, training in artistic craft and scholarship focusing on the field's history and animating ideas, as well as the economic and policy environments for it.



Among research participants, agreement on this ideal was strong. Naming essential elements of an ideal CCD education, a majority of survey participants found practical work more primary than scholarly work. They prized community engagement above all, with classroom training in skills related directly to community engagement a close second. Within CCD, arts training was most valued when it included both conventional artistic skills and core CCD techniques for devising art collaboratively. Participants called for scholarship in the

service of action, rather than distanced or abstract study of subjects that might not affect practice. With respect to social justice, participants sought a nuanced view incorporating the understanding that the sloganeering and militancy sometimes associated with social-justice activism are not necessarily compatible with a practice that values dialogue, one with a high tolerance for difference and the ability to hold contradiction without forcing a conclusion.

**THE CURRENT STATE:** Condense Curriculum Project participants' assessment of the current state of CCD in higher education to a few lines, and here is what they would say: More and more people are trying very hard to make it work, with differential results ranging from extremely promising to dismal; few individuals know enough about the entire field to generalize reliably about it; and while both hopes and cautions are on high alert, it's too soon to tell where this may lead.

Greater resources, a larger potential scale, the opportunity to reflect on practice and create new knowledge, the ability to grant credentials and legitimate practice, a range of courses, commitment to critical thinking and intellectual rigor, a livelihood for practitioner-educators—all of these were cited as reasons to situate CCD programs within higher education. Participants also pointed to obstacles and issues that make this integration difficult, and to a widely perceived gap between aspirations and accomplishments. While the moment is characterized by a passionate pursuit of excellence, of those who responded to our survey question about the state of education for the field, the majority ranked it no higher than “fair.” A notable challenge for those undertaking CCD programs in higher education is how to impart in the more structured and formal setting of a university the ideas, practices, skills and sensibilities they themselves learned through on-the-ground experience and self-directed study. Many specifics, including research participants' assessment of core subjects, key organizations, key texts and exemplary programs, are included in the body of this report.

An underlying direction in most programs' development is recognition of the need to deepen the practice of community engagement. When asked what elements make up their current programs, more than four-fifths of educators and students responding to surveys indicated community engagement, the highest percentage for any element; yet more than two-fifths of educators also indicated that current training in community engagement is insufficient. Only slightly more than half of educators and students saw the strength of their own institutions' community engagement as a positive and more than a third saw it as a negative. Both the aspiration and the need are evident, and people are working hard to close gaps.

**WORTHY CHALLENGES:** Research participants understood that they had taken on an ambitious, sometimes daunting task by attempting to introduce new knowledge and new ways of learning into long-established and tenaciously guarded institutional cultures. Some of the key challenges they face are:

- art-world snobbery permeating arts departments;
- vexed relationships between universities and surrounding communities;
- uncertainty whether community knowledge can be respected and integrated into academic programs;
- uncertainty whether university norms can yield to CCD's commitment to pluralism, participation and equity;
- the problem of respecting the organic time of CCD projects within higher education's time frameworks;
- addressing the tendency to assign faculty without deep CCD experience to teach in new programs;
- fostering reciprocal, meaningful community engagement;
- ensuring that curriculum includes a balance of scholarship, training and community engagement; and
- making professionalization serve the field rather than imposing inappropriate standards or restricting access through credentialing.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE CCD EDUCATION:** Participants called for increased resources for CCD; for more critical discourse, reflection and dialogue among peers; and for collaborative learning that embodies the primacy of relationship within CCD. Five characteristics were typical of their recommendations for fresh models of CCD higher education:

- (1) Combining study and practice so that a close cohort of students learns together, applying what is learned within the university before moving out into broader community engagement;
- (2) Bridging CCD out of arts departments, developing programs based on the reality that practitioners come either from an arts interest or a community organizing interest, converging in CCD;

- (3) Deep and sustained community work;
- (4) Far-ranging and various curriculum components, drawing on the resources of many different specialties available within higher education; and
- (5) Hybrid models, whether collaborations between academic departments or between an academic program and one that is community-based.

Grounded in this research, the report puts forward ten key guidelines summing up the most important values and principles participants offered to inform future development:

- All parties should recognize that this is a period of action research, marked by experimentation in program design, curriculum and approach to every element of CCD education, and should engage in a spirit of true collaboration.
- It is essential that the values shaping CCD practice also inform and influence education in the field.
- Excellence requires a balance of community engagement, training in artistic practice and scholarship focusing on the field's history and animating ideas, as well as the economic and policy environments for CCD work.
- Vibrant, participatory critical discourse is essential to the success of both higher education and practice in CCD. Higher educational institutions are best-positioned to seek support for a sustained, iterative discourse from within their own walls and from resource providers.
- Community cultural development in higher education should have an explicit goal of supporting and developing the field beyond university walls.
- Higher-education programs should develop peer relationships with community-based educational programs for practitioners.
- Effective CCD education requires meaningful, equitable and collaborative relationships between educational institutions and community partners, and developing these relationships requires self-critical awareness from both parties.
- While “champions” may drive new programs as they come into being, it is critical to move toward strengthening programs, so that they don't disappear when their founders move on.
- An overarching aim should be to infuse CCD values across institutions and programs, connecting CCD-focused programs with a matrix of related departments and programs by building relationships with collaborating departments and programs sharing similar values.
- Community cultural development practitioners and educators should collaborate in pursuing emergent opportunities that can benefit both higher education and community-based practitioners.

It is evident that no single organization or project has the ability to implement the insights and recommendations derived from this research. It is a large, multifaceted national project, with roles for everyone who cares about educating young people for community cultural development work. The Curriculum Project team invites every reader of this report to seriously consider what steps he or she can take to ensure the harvest of U.S.-based CCD practitioners gains in quality, quantity and impact each year.