Creative Campus Caucus  
Mellon Foundation  
May 28 and 29th, 2008 

Purpose of the Meeting  
The Caucus was conceived as an opportunity to take stock of the creative campus movement 4 years after the initial American Assembly convening on the relationship between the arts and higher education in the U.S.. What are the major strands of activity that have come to be associated with the “creative campus?” What common themes, challenges and opportunities have emerged? What prospects lie ahead for advancing the promise of a stronger, more vital connection between the arts and higher education?

Participants  
The Creative Campus Caucus drew a diverse set of participants representing the following areas:

- 2 university presidents and one former president
- 2 provosts and 2 deans
- 8 faculty members; 3 sociologists; 2 professors of theater; 1 cognitive psychologist; a mathematician; and the director of the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA. Scholars also included an economist and a higher education specialist.
- 1 director of a national arts service organization
- 7 university-based arts leaders, managers, and presenters
- 10 foundation officers representing the Mellon, Teagle, and Ford Foundations
- 1 senior officer from the American Association of Universities.

Design of the Caucus  
The meeting was designed as a survey, or birds-eye view, of diverse activities and perspectives. As such, the meeting involved close to 25 short presentations over 5 hours. Presenters were expected to talk more generally about the meaning of their work and its “fit” within their own campuses, rather than program details. Participants were asked to “interrogate and reflect” more than “show and tell.” Throughout the day, scholars were asked to present “research minutes” based on current scholarship on issues relevant to the themes of the creative campus. These brief research profiles were intended to give participants a sample of some of the compelling questions that might usefully be asked and answered in the context of understanding the connections between creativity, the arts and the academy. The day concluded with a panel of higher education leaders who spoke about what might be done to sustain the creative campus movement and how the ideas discussed throughout the day fit into larger trends facing universities at the beginning of the 21st century.

General Themes and Reflections  

*Transforming the role of campus “presenter.”* Creative Campus programs are reshaping how campus-based arts presenters conceive of and evaluate their work. In fact, many participants – especially those who received creative campus innovations – spoke about
how their role on campus has been transformed. They no longer think of themselves primarily as curators – responsible for presenting excellent and innovative arts programs for member of the campus community. Instead, many describe their work as facilitators, brokers, and catalysts. No longer is success measured by “butts in seats” or the cache of a season’s repertoire. These arts leader define success as the number of new relationships formed; the activation of new partners; the ability to bring together diverse voices; the formation of new connections with otherwise marginalized members of the community. They have shifted from repertoires to relationships; from excellence to relevance; from the margins to the center. If a university president was to dream up the position of “campus catalyst” – these arts leaders would represent the ideal candidates – they are free from departmental or disciplinary constraints; they are flexible and adaptable and can put together and disband resources and partners on a project-by-project basis; and they deploy a medium (the arts) which, at its core, is about communicating across boundaries and which has the capacity to engage people in multiple ways and at multiple levels. The transformation from campus presenter to campus catalyst is profound.

Placing art and creativity at the center of campus life. A major goal of the creative campus movement is to make the arts more central to campus life. People used the terms “elevate,” “center,” “amplify,” and “re-position” to describe a vision whereby the arts are considered equal contributors to the university’s core mission of teaching, research and public service. This involved recognizing and rewarding the “research” conducted by artists; seeing the artistic process as a key way of learning and knowing about the world; recognizing that the arts are critical bridges for connecting to communities. Rather than being perceived as “grace notes,” participants want the arts to be as central on the agenda of university leaders as science, athletics, liberal education, student services. One participant asked why it is expected that a university president will attend athletic events but the same expectation does not apply to cultural events.

Structural change and intentionality. The work of innovative campus-based arts leaders requires resources – not just money, but also mandate. Faculty must be receptive to working with resident artists and allowing art to be integrated into the curriculum; facilities must be made available for temporary installations or presentations; arts resources – studios, rehearsal halls – need to be accessible to a wider range of campus constituents; leaders must be prepared to handle difficult dialogues engendered by challenging artistic presentations; faculty must be rewarded for participating in interdisciplinary work; space must be provided for new collaborations; failure must be tolerated; tenure must be revamped; artists must be given enough latitude to explore and become enmeshed in campus life. In the words of Nancy Cantor, all of these activities requires being more “intentional” about the role of the arts on campus. It also requires leadership at the top – from deans, provosts, presidents and trustees. In every case, campuses that have succeeded at integrating and amplifying the arts are places where the top executives “get it.” Furthermore, many recognized that transforming the arts on campus will not happen with a single innovations grant or with one great artistic residency. It requires sustained effort and attention by campus leaders. Many wondered and worried about whether such sustained effort and investment was likely; leaving participants optimistic but concerned about the future of the creative campus concept.
Sustaining interest and commitment for the Creative Campus requires knowledge, evidence, and rigorous evaluation. The 2004 American Assembly called for additional research about the scope and impact of the arts on campus. Alberta Arthurs noted, “We know less about the arts on campus than we do about any other aspect of academic life – football or French or food preferences or financial aid – all important, but no more important that the arts.” In spite of this, it is worth interrogating whether research really matters. Are campus leaders, arts practitioners, or the broader public interested in the types of questions that social scientists and others are asking about creativity, the arts and higher education? The Creative Campus Caucus meeting was not intended to answer this question or to develop and test the usefulness of a research agenda. Nonetheless, at this meeting, as well as at several other meetings where the creative campus has been discussed over the last 2 years – people become animated and engaged when scholars talk about their work. The research minutes at the Caucus were stimulating; they raised interesting questions that became fodder for hallway conversations; and they seemed to produce interesting intellectual connections and “aha” moments for the participants – whether we were discussing evidence of the cognitive benefits of artistic learning for college students; considering the advantages or disadvantages of double majoring in an arts and non-arts discipline; exploring “everyday” and “social” creativity in the lives of students; or thinking about the differences across universities in levels of student engagement in the arts. While necessarily speculative, we conclude that participants in the creative campus movement feel that their work is legitimized by the presence of serious scholarship; they feel like they work in a vacuum and are hungry for evidence that can inform the decisions they make and the programs they develop; and are eager to find confirmatory evidence that the arts can add value to learning, discovery and campus life.

Artistic discovery is a legitimate mode of inquiry. Meeting participants made the claim that the “artistic process” represents a valid, legitimate and increasingly important mode of discovery. Artists are scholars and researchers just like traditional humanists, social scientists and natural and biological scientists. The ways that artists pose questions, use analogy, analyze evidence, formulate hypotheses, incorporate feedback from the environment, and conduct experiments offer students and faculty colleagues with new perspectives, new methodologies, and new leverage. Several participants discussed the synergies that develop when artists work with scientists, doctors or mathematicians. People remarked that the artistic process might be a more natural entry point for many students into the methods of research and discovery. Others noted that larger shifts in the economy and the growing presence and prevalence of art and entertainment in our personal and professional lives will make artistic modes of inquiry even more important in the future.

Campuses are incubators of experimentation in the arts. Similar to basic science, university campuses can be “protective” environments where artists experiment with and advance ideas and techniques that might not otherwise be supported by the market or in the nonprofit sector. People made the argument that new artistic movements, new styles, and art that challenges conventions or existing norms can emerge more easily in a
university setting. Universities are sites where “truth” is challenged; where experimentation is accepted; where diversity is celebrated. All of these qualities of university life should contribute to artistic innovation and experimentation. On the other hand, universities and colleges labor under the weight of their own conventions, politics, and constraints raising the possibility that the “ideal” of the university as a haven for experimentation might not, in fact, exist in reality (or only exist in certain special contexts).

The Creative Campus is about higher education reform, not just arts advocacy. While acknowledging that universities have a responsibility to promote and support the arts, most presentations focused instead on the role of the arts in advancing the mission of higher education. Participants reflected on the value that the arts bring to the task of teaching, learning, research, intellectual dialogue, public debate and campus community. It was noted that art and creativity, media and design, narrative and expressive life are critical solutions for meeting current challenges facing universities. The Creative Campus may represent a new frontier for the traditional liberal arts -- providing educators with a way to engage students in diverse and broad intellectual traditions, while emphasizing creative practice, new technologies, community-based learning, and the development of 21st century competencies.

Activism and Commitment. Most broad-based movements, whether in education, the environment or the arts, begin with a core group of “visionaries” – people who deeply believe in change, feel personally invested in the process and are willing to take risks and be among the “first movers” to forge new paths. Throughout the meeting, the commitment and passion of these creative campus “visionaries” was on display. The participants represented some of the most active and innovative campus-based arts leaders in the country. The general feeling in the room – confirmed by discussions during breaks and after the meeting – is that the creative campus movement has tremendous promise. These are impassioned leaders and there was no sense that the movement was losing steam or that “the moment” – in Alberta Arthurs’ words – had passed. It was clear from the participants that they valued the chance to come together; they felt reenergized in their work; and they would like more occasions to meet, share ideas and look for opportunities to broaden the work they are doing. To the extent that the meeting included many of the “core” creative campus stakeholders, it is fair to say this “movement” – if it can be called that – has a very dedicated and talented inner circle who stand ready to continue advocating, investigating and communicating the value of placing art and creativity at the center of campus life.

Challenges
There are many challenges that lie ahead for creative campus work. Higher education leaders are intrigued by the idea of the creative campus, they are convinced that creativity might lie at the heart of education reform, they believe that the creative campus brand will help them recruit interesting and talented students and faculty. That said, there is little evidence about the value of art and creativity; little guidance in terms of strategies for investments; and a general ambiguity about what a “creative campus” actually means. Unquestionably, there has been considerable momentum in the last four years and
innovative creative campus programs will likely emerge for years to come. However, without national leadership, built around credible research and sophisticated conversations, the potential for the creative campus movement to tip over and become a significant higher education initiative will be lost. In two or three years, the creative campus may well be remembered as a fashionable and intriguing alliteration.

Next Steps
Meeting participants did not offer a list of suggested next steps. In the final report, we will look more closely for comments that offer clues as to what people hope to see emerge from the Caucus and from future efforts to advance the Creative Campus concept. In the meantime, we offer the following reflections based on our history with and knowledge of the movement along with the emerging initiatives taking place on our own campus.

1) The Creative Campus is a diverse set of activities represented by an equally diverse set of actors. This is, at present, less of a “movement” and more of a series of independent eddies and streams. It is our belief, at this point, that any attempt to organize all of this work under a single umbrella will, in some ways, run counter to the spirit of the movement. We do not recommend institutionalizing the creative campus within a single entity.

2) Generally speaking, campus-based arts leaders across the country are looking for more opportunities to meet, share ideas and develop shared approaches to fostering, cultivating, integrating and amplifying the arts on their campuses.

3) Existing case studies and examples serve as useful anecdotes but have not been collected, analyzed and reported on in a way that might provide generalizable insight and knowledge about what works, what doesn’t, and why. A sophisticated and analytically rigorous series of case studies, collected in a single monograph, would likely serve the field well. It is important that this monograph not be perceived as a “bragging book” or as simple program descriptions. A smart team of scholars should be engaged to do this work in a credible and useful way.

4) There is clearly interest in developing a shared Web site where people can post examples of creative campus programming. While this idea seems enticing and fairly simple to execute at first glance, it is not entirely clear what type of information would be most useful on a Web site; who would maintain it; and how it would be made dynamic enough to sustain repeated visits and remain informative. We suspect that Arts Presenters will create a Web site to feature the programs funded by the Duke innovations grants. As universities and colleges create their own sites, eventually the Arts Presenters’ site might serve as a useful “switch board” -- providing links to material generated independently by others involved in creative campus work.
Future of the Curb Creative Campus Program

Two priorities emerge as the Curb Center considers its future involvement and role in the creative campus movement. We believe great progress has been made across a number of campuses working to integrate the arts more centrally into campus life. But, to date, these efforts have been piece meal, time bound, project-focused and generally lacking solid research to test their assumptions and measure their impact. Mike Curb’s recent gift of between $10 and $15 million to launch a creative campus program on Vanderbilt’s campus provides a unique opportunity to create a multi-year laboratory to experiment and systematically implement and test a number of creative campus ideas. Curb’s gift will provide some support for creative campus programs, but the vast majority of the gift will be used to fund scholarships, faculty positions, internships and curriculum design. But, more important than the dollar amount, the Curb gift has helped to make the “creative campus” a priority for the chancellor, the provost and the deans. Vanderbilt has publicly announced that it will launch The Mike Curb Creative Campus Program with the aim of “affecting every student on campus.” This highly visible commitment from the university’s executive leadership provides us with a rare opportunity to experiment and test assumptions in a fairly significant way. With the right national partner, we imagine developing a program – connected with our Freshman Commons – that will be bold enough to transform the freshman experience. Along with such a program, the Curb Center can put in place a research process to test the outcomes of the experiment – to see whether students who are “exposed” to a sequence of creative campus programs – curricular and extracurricular – have a demonstrably different experience than their classmates who are not on the “creative campus” track.

Second, based on conversations with higher education leaders across the country, we have come to the conclusion that the creative campus movement has reached a threshold point in its development. We have identified almost a dozen top-level campuses that are ready to participate in a national program of research and development. These campuses are eager to be associated with a cohort of peer institutions, who, together, have made a public commitment to become creative campuses. The time is right to organize a national research collaborative of 10-15 reputable campuses, lending stature and focus to the movement and developing the information base necessary to create and sustain real reform.

Based on initial contacts, we envision identifying partner campuses in the fall 2008 – with each campus recruiting a minimum of 2 principal investigators, a social scientist and an artist, arts leader or humanities scholar. The principal investigators from across the participating campuses will meet 4 times over 18 months in an effort to develop a shared research agenda and pilot programs. Given the mix of artists and social scientists, the process of developing an agenda will, in itself, represent the interdisciplinary ideals of the creative campus. While the main goal of the 18 month investigation will be to develop a more substantial long-term agenda, we expect that several short term briefing papers, reports, and even creative documentation projects might emerge. If the collaborative discovers a mutually agreeable project that they wish to undertake, we would seek a mix of funding to move forward – including a lead gift from a national funder; grants from
regional foundations where participating campuses are based, and direct contributions from each campus.

Each of the above ideas, in our mind, follows from the Creative Campus Caucus. Each presents opportunities to achieve scale and visibility for the creative campus initiative as well as a credible base of information and knowledge going forward. And, each fits well within the mission and profile of the Curb Center; taking advantage of the talents of the Center, our national reputation, strong relationships with potential partner campuses, and the recent generous gift from Mike Curb.