A&A Faculty Council Gen Ed Subcommittee
A Statement of Belief and Principles

Background: The College of Arts and Architecture was created in 1963, in part as an outgrowth of the Rackley Plan (John Ralph Rackley, Dean of the School of Education) that proposed the establishment of three “Core Colleges” (Arts and Architecture, the College of the Liberal Arts, and the College of Science) “to guarantee the necessary foundation of a comprehensive liberal arts education for all Penn State students.” Since its creation, the College of Arts and Architecture has held that the arts are a necessary and important part of a “comprehensive liberal arts education for all Penn State students” and, consequently, we see the arts as a key component of General Education.

To that end, we believe:

The arts enrich life. They inspire and nurture creativity. Beyond their intrinsic and essential value, both to the individual and to society, the arts—and the creative processes they cultivate—inform academic disciplines outside the arts, contributing immeasurably to problem solving in areas such as science and mathematics. The arts foster imagination, which is at the heart of nearly all human thought, and the scientific and social progress that has accompanied it.

The arts must occupy a place of importance in any conception of General Education if we are to succeed in enabling students "to acquire the skills, knowledge, and experiences for living and working in interconnected and global contexts, so they can contribute to making life better for others, themselves, and the larger world." The arts are concerned with the inherent value and importance of human expression—particularly, expression beyond words—that can only be made through the various disciplines of art.

Given the realities of primary and secondary education, many students come to Penn State with little or no formal background or education in the arts. Their undergraduate experience at Penn State may be the first and possibly last opportunity for them to gain knowledge of and experience in the arts in a formal setting. For this reason, we believe that any viable program of General Education must allow for the arts to exist as a distinct and required component for all students.

Guiding Principles

In order to meet that challenge, we advance the following principles to guide our General Education offering. We believe that the arts component of General Education must:

Be varied and offer a wide variety of opportunities across the disciplines of art to serve the diverse interests of students

Provide students with the ability to acquire skills, knowledge, and experiences in an equally wide variety of contexts to address various modes of learning, creative practices, artistic experiences, and differing viewpoints on art and art making

Be rigorous and challenging in whatever context offerings exist, whether that context is primarily creative, interpretive, or scholarly

Offer significant opportunities for students to explore international and intercultural knowledge and understanding in the arts