

Cover page

Title

Community-Engaged Arts + Design

Participating disciplines/units/departments

Our interdisciplinary group spans arts, architecture, humanities, and social sciences from the College of Arts + Architecture (CoA+A) and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS), including participants associated with the following:

Academic departments, programs and centers

Africana Studies
Architecture
Art and Art History (graduate certificate in Arts Education)
Center for the Study of the New South
City.Building.Lab
Communication Studies
English
Gerontology
Health and Medical Humanities (minor)
Political Science and Public Administration
Sociology
Theatre
Women's and Gender Studies (minor, graduate certificate)

Graduate programs (masters)

Master of Architecture
Master of Fine Arts (in development)
Master of Public Administration
Master of Urban Design
Master of Arts in Communication Studies
Master of Arts in English
Master of Arts in Sociology

Graduate programs (doctoral)

Health Psychology (Ph.D.)
Organizational Science (Ph.D.)
Public Policy (Ph.D.)

Lead organizers

Nadia Anderson Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design
Director of the City Building Lab

Vaughn Schmutz Associate Professor of Sociology
Editor, *Poetics: Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts*

Target category

Existing and emerging excellence

Keywords

Community; arts; design; equity; health

Executive Summary

Community-Engaged Arts + Design

We are an interdisciplinary group of scholars that span the arts, architecture and design, humanities, and social sciences from the College of Arts + Architecture (CoA+A) and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS). Our scholarship and creative activity represent a wide range of theoretical perspectives, approaches to community engagement, research methods, and areas of expertise. In describing our group as *community-engaged*, we mean that group members do work that includes at least one of the following:

- *inclusive decision-making and design systems in underserved communities
- *scholarly and creative work co-created with community partners
- *collaborative relationships with community arts organizations
- *creative work that engages specific communities
- *research with practical implications for education, public policy, and arts management
- *increased community access to and engagement with arts and/or design

Big questions about arts + design

Our research and creative activity focuses on collaboration and outcomes that address some of the most complex questions and challenges facing our local, national, and global communities. Some of these questions include:

1. How can arts and design enrich **community life** in Charlotte and beyond?
2. In what ways can arts and design promote **justice, equity, mobility and opportunity**?
3. How are individual and community **health and well-being** affected by arts and design?
4. What roles can **arts-based teaching and learning** play in social change?

Evidence of strength and excellence

All members of this group have demonstrated excellence in one or more of the overlapping themes represented by these big questions: *community; justice, equity and opportunity; health and well-being; and arts-based teaching and learning*. Evidence of this excellence takes many forms, including articles, books, design projects, exhibitions, documentary films, grant awards, poetry, theatre productions, and more.

Alignment with regional and national priorities

Our interdisciplinary and community-engaged research and creative activity aligns with a number of key priorities for the university, the Charlotte region, and national funding sources:

- *UNC Charlotte's mission as North Carolina's urban research university
- *The 2018 Civic Action Plan
- *National Science Foundation (NSF)
- *National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- *National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
- *National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
- *2017 Opportunity Task Force Report

Evidence of Strength and Excellence

Our group represents a variety of approaches to community-engaged arts and design; therefore, the products of our research, creative work, and scholarly activity take many forms, including articles, books, design projects, exhibitions, documentary films, grant awards, poetry, theatre productions, and more. Members have produced an impressive array of publications; received external funding; attracted scholarly and public attention; won significant awards and honors; collaborated with undergraduate and graduate students in scholarly and creative work, and created relationships with many external entities. As a result, the group is well-positioned to address complex questions, such as:

1. How can arts and design enrich **community life** in Charlotte and beyond?
2. In what ways can arts and design promote **justice, equity, mobility and opportunity**?
3. How are individual and community **health and well-being** affected by arts and design?
4. What roles can **arts-based teaching and learning** play in social change?

COMMUNITY LIFE

***José Gámez** studies architecture and urbanism through action-based research and public scholarship; 6 projects (past five years) received external research funding and awards totaling \$281,000; received Provost's Faculty Award for Community Engagement (2015); community partners include Latin American Coalition, Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG), and University City Partners; the CCOG Blueprint project involved 140+ community workshops in 14-county region that includes Mecklenburg; 30 graduate students were involved in this work.

***Nadia Anderson** focuses on publicly-engaged design and recently received a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support neighborhood visioning projects to address housing, transportation, and public space; the Gambrell Foundation is supporting her work on a design toolkit for affordable housing in Charlotte; Director of The City Building Lab.

***Meg Whalen** leads Arts Impact Charlotte, a university-community partnership to assess social impact of arts/design in Charlotte (other members: **Nadia Anderson, Carlos Alexis Cruz, José Gámez, Vaughn Schmutz**); community partners in the advisory group include many artists/arts organizations. Gambrell Foundation funded a landscape survey of such artists/organizations.

JUSTICE, EQUITY, MOBILITY & OPPORTUNITY

***Jaclyn Piatak** is a widely published expert on volunteering, and public and nonprofit management; she studies diversity and inclusion in the arts; works with Public Policy Ph.D. students and MPA students; chaired graduate thesis on arts access in Charlotte; community partnerships with Blumenthal Performing Arts, Charlotte Ballet, and Mint Museum.

***Janaka Lewis** is an award-winning author, listed on Charlotte Business Journal's "40 under 40" for community engagement; Director of Women's and Gender Studies, and interim Director of the Center for the Study of the New South; studies Black women's narratives and their social mobility in literature; expert on Black womanhood and creative production; community involvement Eastside Development Co., Charlotte Literary Festival, Charlotte Teachers Institute.

***Vaughn Schmutz** is editor of *Poetics* (international journal of research on arts and culture); lead PI of \$29,000 NEA grant to study arts-based social mobility in Charlotte (co-PIs: **Meg Whalen** and **Jane Dalton**); Gambrell Foundation-funded study of cultural capital and economic opportunity in Charlotte; media coverage in *Charlotte Observer*; partnerships with Lórien

Academy of the Arts, Charlotte Symphony, and the Jail Arts program at the Bechtler Museum have involved four undergraduate and two graduate students in community-based research.

***Carlos Alexis Cruz** is Producing Artistic Director of the Nouveau Sud Circus project; a circus for social change company in service of intercultural and cross cultural communication in Charlotte. Nouveau Sud was awarded a NEFA National Theatre Project Creation and Touring grant for Bestia. The Knight Foundation funded MAX (Mobile Arts and community eXperience), a traveling stage for outdoor performances and workshops (\$350,000 with **José Gámez**). Nouveau Sud has received about \$250,000 in support of its development and evolution.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

***Margaret Quinlan** is Director of the Health/Medical Humanities minor and core faculty in the Health Psychology Ph.D. program. She co-produced four documentaries that explore the connections between art and well-being, one of which won a regional Emmy award and all of which have attracted media attention; published work includes a book and dozens of articles, several of which have earned national awards; many students collaborate on research and documentaries.

***Christine Davis** is a Fulbright Scholar (2020-21) and founding Director for the Health/Medical Humanities minor; extensive publication record, co-authored work with many graduate students; external engagement with Carolinas Healthcare System/Atrium: Levine Children's Hospital Pediatric Palliative Care Team; Carolinas Rehabilitation; has received external funding from NIH and Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

ARTS-BASED TEACHING & LEARNING

***Beth Murray** is a scholar of theatre education/applied theatre with an extensive record of publication, exhibition and performance. Her community-engaged scholarship centers multimodal, multilingual literacies, arts-based assessment and arts-driven storytelling for learning and intercultural understanding; past editor of *Youth Theatre Journal*.

***Jane Dalton** is co-author and co-editor of 5 books that address transformative learning through the arts; expert in arts-based research methods; provides professional development workshops to promote mindfulness, critical thinking, and creativity; expert on contemplative practices in the arts classroom.

As briefly noted above, all group members have achieved excellence in their areas of expertise and are recognized locally, nationally, and/or internationally for their scholarship and creative activity. We see strong potential for further collaboration among the participants in this nomination to address complex questions and challenges that face communities in Charlotte and beyond. Emerging collaborations within this group span CLAS and CoA+A, such as the university-community partnership Arts Impact Charlotte (**Whalen, Anderson, Cruz, Gámez, Schmutz**) and a recent NEA grant (**Schmutz, Whalen, Dalton**), are early evidence of this potential. Additional support would enable us to build on these emerging connections and extensive ties to external entities in the Charlotte region to identify large-scale sources of funding to support research that addresses complex questions about the role of arts and design in community life, equality and opportunity, health and well-being, and transformative teaching and learning. Such questions align well with several regional and national priorities outlined below.

Alignment with Regional and National Priorities

Our initiative advances UNC Charlotte's mission as North Carolina's urban research university by contributing to a "focused set of community engagement initiatives," supporting a wide range of university research activities and cross-disciplinary inquiry, expanding opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research, and engaging the multiple publics, needs, and opportunities of the Charlotte region and beyond. As stated in the [2018 Civic Action Plan \(CAP\)](#), community-engaged research is critical for responding to Charlotte's need to improve socio-economic mobility. In keeping with CAP recommendations to create an integrated institutional structure for engaged research, this cluster is anchored by the Colleges of Arts + Architecture (CoAA) and Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), bringing arts, humanities, and social sciences together to develop shared community-based research, facilitate partnerships with other research areas, and reduce barriers between the academy and multiple publics. Our nomination aligns with key priorities of national funding organizations and regional initiatives.

The [National Science Foundation](#) reviews all funding proposals in terms of intellectual merit and broader impacts. Broader impacts include more inclusionary research practices, particularly with respect to underrepresented groups, publicly accessible distribution of research results, and societal impact. This cluster can partner with scientific research teams to strengthen proposals through connections with community-based organizations, needs, and opportunities.

Several **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** priorities align well with our scholarship in health humanities, architecture, artistic, and humanities-based ways of knowing, and contemplative science. In health promotion and disease prevention, for example, we can develop research on improving health outcomes using humanistic study of health behaviors to understand and facilitate health promotion. In the area of fundamental science on the interaction between living systems and social environments, our arts, humanities, and social science-based work can lead to understanding complexities involved in systemic and social influences on health behaviors. In the area of clinical and translational science, our research can examine how contemplative, arts and humanities-based interventions can lead to improved health outcomes, pain management, therapeutic approaches, and resilience. Our community-based scholarship on social justice and equality addresses NIH focus on health disparities. Finally, our architectural focus fits NIH interest in studying housing and neighborhoods that support community health and wellness.

The [National Endowment for the Humanities](#)' strategic planning goals include increasing access to the humanities in underserved communities, expanding post-secondary scholarship, and encouraging "collaboration between humanities scholars and academics of other disciplines." Above all, engaged humanities research locates communities and other research areas within cultural contexts, enhancing development of meaningful, relevant applied research.

The [National Endowment for the Arts](#)' (NEA) goals to expand opportunities for Americans, particularly in underserved communities, to engage with the arts; integrate the arts "into the fabric of community life," and "expand and promote evidence of the value and impact of the arts for the benefit of the American people." This last goal emphasizes the value of creative arts and humanities in partnership with other types of research initiatives described above.

In addition, this initiative will expand UNC Charlotte's engagement with the local and regional needs described in the [2017 Opportunity Task Force Report](#) through partnerships with underserved neighborhoods, youth organizations, and education systems at all levels. This can also facilitate funding from local and national foundations.

Community-Engaged Arts + Design

List of participants

Name	Title	Contribution/Expertise
Nadia Anderson	Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design	Publicly-engaged design for social empowerment and environmental resilience
CarlosAlexis Cruz, MFA	Associate Professor of Physical Theatre	Community Engaged Circus and Physical Theatre, empowering the stories of underrepresented communities
Dr. Jane Dalton	Associate Professor of Art Education	Mindfulness, contemplative pedagogy and practice, and transformative learning using the arts
Dr. Christine S. Davis	Professor of Communication Studies	Children's health and disability; End-of-life communication; Communication, culture, and politics; Arts-based methods; poetic/aesthetic ethnography
Dr. José L.S. Gámez	Professor, Architecture and Urban Design / Interim Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs	Research explores questions of culture in architecture and urbanism through action-based research and public scholarship
Dr. Janaka Lewis	Associate Professor of English	Gender studies and cultural impact, Black women's narratives, Storytelling, Black Girlhood narratives
Dr. Beth Murray	Associate Professor of Theatre Education	Theatre education/applied theatre; community-engages scholarship; multimodal, multilingual literacies, arts-based assessment and arts-driven storytelling for learning and intercultural understanding

Dr. Jaelyn Piatak	Associate Professor, Political Science & Public Administration	Diversity and inclusion in the arts, volunteering, and public and nonprofit management
Dr. Margaret M. Quinlan	Associate Professor of Communication Studies	Aesthetics, visual ethnography, participatory community-based research related to health and gender
Dr. Vaughn Schmutz	Associate Professor of Sociology	Sociology of art and culture,
Meg Whalen	Director of Communications and External Relations (COA+A)	Expert on media relations and the Charlotte arts community; coordinator, Arts Impact CLT; board member of local arts agency and arts organizations