



**UTSA**

The University of Texas at San Antonio

## COLFA TACTICAL VISIONING PROCESS: Phase II

*September, 2021*

UTSA College of Liberal and Fine Arts

# COLFA Tactical Visioning Process Phase II

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## *Background:*

Humanities, interpretive social sciences, and the arts (HISSA) are bedrocks of higher education and essential drivers of progress towards UTSA's strategic destinations. The American Academy of Arts & Sciences' Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences 2013 report, *The Heart of the Matter: The humanities and social sciences for a vibrant, competitive, and secure nation*, located the role of the liberal and fine arts in our collective future succinctly: "as we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic – a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common."<sup>1</sup>

Nearly a decade after the Commission penned its remarks; the vital importance of HISSA has become even more evident. The erosion of civil public discourse fueled in part by the reach afforded through digital communication technologies, the growing disparities and inequities exacerbated by emerging infectious disease, chronic illness, and the impacts of climate change, the expanding awareness of the webs of injustice spawned by systemic racism in institutions and in public life, and the stubborn persistence of the old practice of scapegoating immigrants and "others" as the root cause of local and national problems constitute immanent grand challenges that must be addressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, the creative impulse and content creation emphases inherent in HISSA have increasingly become drivers of economic growth and prosperity in both large and small urban centers through the emergence of what Richard Florida has termed the "creative class." Content rich amenities in urban centers, Florida argues, have fueled the migration of high-tech firms from "faceless suburban office parks" to vibrant downtown areas consisting of mixed use commercial and residential building and a wide swath of art galleries, live music venues, and rich cultural diversity.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding a national trend of decreasing enrollments in liberal arts programs and a simultaneous amplification of a negative public discourse targeting the humanities in recent years, the Humanities Indicators Project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences reports that in the U.S. there is "considerable agreement about the personal and societal benefits of the humanities, substantial engagement with a variety of humanities activities at home and in the workplace, and strong support for teaching humanities subjects in the schools."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, evidence suggests that integration of HISSA with STEMM disciplines enhances "critical thinking abilities, higher-order thinking and deeper learning, content mastery, problem solving, teamwork and communication skills, improved visuospatial

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences. 2013. *The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a vibrant, competitive, and secure nation* p. 9. (Retrieved 4 Aug 2021 from: [www.amacad.org](http://www.amacad.org))

<sup>2</sup> Florida, Richard. 2012. *The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited*. 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>3</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences. 2020. *The Humanities in American Life: Insights from a survey on the public's attitudes and engagement*. pp. 1-2. (Retrieved 4 Aug 2021 from: <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/survey-public-perceptions-humanities>.)

reasoning, and general engagement and enjoyment of learning.”<sup>4</sup> The unique constellation of 1) grassroots support for HISSA and 2) increasing evidence of their global benefits together with 3) the immanent grand challenges facing society today, which can only be understood and addressed with research from HISSA, and 4) the role of creativity and content creation in fueling prosperity and economic growth present a unique opportunity for the College of Liberal and Fine Arts to assert itself as a significant force in propelling UTSA toward its three strategic destinations. Please view the video short [Defining Moments: An interdisciplinary performance](#) produced by COLFA students and faculty in collaboration with Academic Innovation. This video displays the extraordinary power of HISSA in addressing real world challenges through creative expression in diverse modalities.

### *Phase I:*

The College of Liberal and Fine Arts at UTSA initiated a tactical visioning exercise in 2020 to explore and articulate a cohesive identity for its nine departments and multiple programs. The exercise was envisioned in two phases. Phase I sought to identify ways for COLFA to best serve the stakeholders of the region through practices specific to its identity and mission in nationally distinctive ways. Phase II seeks to conceptualize notional models that will allow COLFA to unleash its full potential in responding to the grand challenges facing our world today while fostering a cohesive institutional identity rooted in its core disciplinary perspectives and practices.

### *Findings from Phase I:*

The Phase I visioning process assembled a team of 34 faculty, staff, and students to help COLFA identify its greatest strengths and opportunities. The team was divided into four subcommittees focusing on 1) Community Engagement, 2) UTSA Landscape, 3) Identity, and 4) Peer models. The following major points emerged from the exercise:

- 1) COLFA is the college dedicated to exploring, metabolizing, understanding, and representing the *human experience* in the totality of its diversity, in the contexts of its environments, and in the arc of its history
- 2) COLFA prepares students with a variety of critical “soft skills” and profound engagement with critical and creative thinking that are applied across the spectrum of the professions. COLFA graduates are both problem-solvers and problem-finders.
- 3) COLFA’s work and contribution to the university and the region remain largely unseen and are in need of amplification on campus and in the community through multiple media in a variety of venues.
- 4) Peer models exhibit **programs** that are *student-centered, student-designed, problem-based, and learning focused* through **curricula** that *engages immediately and grapples with real world questions* within a **structure** that *inspires and encourages interdisciplinarity*, and in a **context** of *acceptance and belonging*.

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<sup>4</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Higher Education: Branches from the Same Tree*. Washington DC: The National Academies Press. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.17226/24988>

## Charge for Phase II:

COLFA stands at a tipping point in which it is poised to assume a leadership role in helping UTSA arrive at its three destinations 1) A model for student success, 2) A great public research university, and 3) An exemplar for strategic growth and innovative excellence) as an outstanding Hispanic Thriving learning and discovery enterprise. Five forcing functions will guide our thinking as we ideate the structure and impact of COLFA as the *college of the human experience* that studies and seeks to understand what it means to be human, bringing together the multiple perspectives of HISSA.

- **Applied:** Human experiences differentially shape the impact of social, economic, health and environmental challenges. Disparities and inequities are *determined* by different experiences, but at the same time *generate* differential experiences.
  - How do we engage across the university and in the community to power research and discovery on society's most challenging issues?
  - How do we become intentional about developing the workplace skills and perspectives that community stakeholders value in our graduates?
- **Creativity and Content Creation:** The human experience is represented through creative renderings across multiple media including digital, visual and performing arts. Perspectives emerging from the humanities and social sciences, moreover, inform and shape creative renderings in powerful ways.
  - How do we best identify and promote integration of the liberal and fine arts with the goal of creating compelling content?
  - How do we best equip students to become content creators and to systematically draw on the creative impulses of the liberal and fine arts?
- **Digital:** The human experience is increasingly impacted by digital transformations. Interactions in the digital space offer a degree of cover that engender new social and interaction practices. New technologies situate and personalize human interaction with digital media. At the same time, digital transformations facilitate the collection of enormous amounts of data that have the potential of generating new insights into human thought and behavior.
  - How do we best engage digital transformations both within our disciplines and beyond?
  - How do we best equip our students to engage with digital transformations?
- **Global:** The human experience is shaped by movement and interaction. Real and metaphoric borders invite mobility while also engendering immobility. (Im)mobility and (im)mobilization drive the interactions that make up the human experience.
  - How do we best account for the (im)mobilities that shape the human experience from multiple disciplinary perspectives?
  - How do we push ourselves and our students to cross borders and boundaries and to learn about others and ourselves in the process?
- **Public:** Human experiences are represented and metabolized through a variety of media. Public approaches to the human experience seek to amplify and diversify opportunities for critical engagement with disciplinary knowledge and practices.
  - How do we best share our disciplinary perspectives with multiple stakeholders in a variety of venues?

- How do we best prepare our students to be ambassadors of disciplinary knowledge and perspectives?

### *Phase II Deliverables*

With these five forcing functions in mind, the **Phase II Tactical Visioning Team** will engage in sketching multiple notional models that will address current structural barriers and identify new opportunities for COLFA to emerge as a force that will accelerate UTSA's trajectory towards its destinations. Notional models are structures, organizations and configurations that maximize synergies within, between, and beyond disciplines while preserving and enhancing core disciplinary functions. Notional models may include a variety of different configurations of schools, departments, programs, centers, and institutes. Two instructive examples of recent visioning processes include UTSA's [Integrated Design](#) and [Human Health](#) initiatives.

### *Phase II Requirements:*

Phase II ideation and visioning is meant to draw on the creative impulses of the college to chart a new course for the expansion and amplification of the humanities, arts and interpretive social sciences at UTSA, in San Antonio and in the broader South Texas region. The following requirements should be observed in each notional model proposed:

1. Each notional model must incorporate the Southwest School of Art as a vital component of arts education at UTSA.
2. All existing academic programs must have a landing spot in each notional model.
3. Notional models may create opportunities for the development of new transdisciplinary programs but should not propose new programs at the present time.

### *Phase II Committee:*

**Andrea Aleman**, Political Science and Geography

**Paul Ardoin**, Philosophy and Classics

**Richard Armendariz**, Art and Art History

**Nazgol Bagheri**, Political Science and Geography

**Mark Bayer**, English

**Justin Boyd**, Southwest School of Art

**Rebecca Bria**, Anthropology

**JoAnn Browning**, Dean of the College of Engineering and Integrated Design

**Isaac Bustos**, Music

**Lilian Cano**, Modern Languages and Literatures

**Whitney Chappell**, Modern Languages and Literatures

**Nichole Cherry**, Music

**Isaura Contreras Ríos**, Modern Languages and Literatures

**Tracy Cowden**, Music

**Stacey Davis**, Music

**Jennifer Dilley**, History

**Gregory Elliot**, Art and Art History

**Devin Flaherty**, Anthropology  
**Jill Fleuriet**, Associate Dean for Faculty Success and Associate Dean for the Honors College  
**Dean Hendrix**, Dean of Libraries  
**Annie Herrera**, Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration  
**Seok Kang**, Director of the Center for Digital Initiatives  
**Sean Kelly**, Dean of the Honors College  
**Shamshad Khan**, Communication  
**Paul Le Blanc**, Communication  
**Chad Mahood**, Communication  
**Joycelyn Moody**, English  
**Juan Mora**, Art & Art History  
**Sharon Navarro**, Political Science and Geography  
**Wing Chung Ng**, History  
**Jessica Nowlin**, Philosophy and Classics  
**Sonia Saldivar Hull**, English  
**Chris Sauter**, Southwest School of Art  
**Scott Sherer**, Art and Art History  
**Will Smith**, Assistant Dean and Director of the Center for Student Excellence  
**Jill Sortore**, Southwest School of Art  
**Ryan Takaba**, Southwest School of Art  
**Jon Taylor**, Political Science and Geography  
**Serife Tekin**, Philosophy and Classics  
**Libby Rowe**, Art and Art History  
**David Vance**, English  
**Kenny Walker**, English  
**Jason Yaeger**, Senior Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies

### **Facilitators**

Co-conveners: **Glenn Martinez** and **Nathan Richardson**  
Project director: **Shannon Heuberger**  
Project coordinator: **Terri Reynolds**  
Senior Communication Specialist: **Tricia Schwennesen**

### ***Phase II Timeline:***

August 4, 2021	Announce kick-off of Phase II and refer colleagues to Phase I documentation
August 16, 2021	Form Phase II committee and send invitations
August 30, 2021	Inaugural Phase II meeting and delivery of charge; college-wide distribution of charge
September 6, 2021	Establish sub-committees and describe parameters of notional models
September 6 through October 25, 2021	Sub-committee meetings
November 1-22, 2021	Dean/Provost review, departmental vetting, and community stakeholder input