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Industry-Higher Education Partnerships in the New York Cultural Economy

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HASTAC members might be interested in this testimony, which I delivered on September 15, 2009, to Governor Pattererson's Task Force on Diversifying the New York State Economy Through Industry-Higher Education Partnerships.

Public Hearing, Tuesday, September 15, 2009

"Industry-Higher Education Partnerships in the Cultural Economy"

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President Skorton and Members of the Task Force,

I am Timothy Murray, Director of the Society for the Humanities and Professor of Comparative Literature and English at Cornell University. Upon reading the charge of your Task Force announced by Governor Patterson, I was struck by the fact that a significant aspect of the economy so important to the tax base of New York State seemed to fall outside of the Task Force's charge to focus on commercial collaboration in science, engineering, and agriculture. Please accept my gratitude for scheduling time for my testimony on the importance and promise of pursuing innovative Industry-Higher Education Partnerships in the broad area of the cultural economy. New York State is the East Coast's industry leader in an expansive array of cultural fields, from publishing, film production, fashion, and television to the fine arts, literature, architecture, and performance across the disciplines of music, theatre, and dance. Our libraries are treasures across the state, just as our museums are international centers and sources of tremendous interface between the academy and the not-for-profit sector. Given the prominence of the culture industry in New York State and the particular strength of the humanities and arts in our diverse set of institutions of higher

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education, I urge the Governor's Office to pursue aggressively and creatively the promise of emergent partnerships between industry and the academy across the disciplines of the arts and humanities.

In 2008, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released a massive report on "Creative Economy: The Challenge of Assessing the Creative Economy: Towards Informed Policy-Making." Urging the development of international creative and cultural economies, the report dwells on the promise of what it calls "creative industries," which "comprise a set of knowledge-based activities that produce tangible goods and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value, and market objectives" (UNCTAD, 4). The UN report emphasizes the tremendous promise of creative activity across the disciplines, particularly as they intersect with new developments in technology and cultural access. It documents how the creative industries account for 3.4 percent of total world trade, with exports reaching \$424.4 billion in 2005 and an average annual growth rate of 8.7 percent during 2002-2005. With publishing leading the way, workers in US creative industries constitute 2.3 percent of the American workforce (UNCTAD, 25). The conversion of multimedia and telecommunication technologies have spawned a new "integration of the means by which creative content is produced, distributed, and consumed," fostering in turn new forms of artistic, creative, and intellectual expression. Citing the growing adaptation of cultural content to new technologies in video games, animation, and other audiovisual services, the report emphasizes that the number of distribution channels and platforms via cable, satellite, and the Internet is generating "an increasing demand for creative content. It is the task of the creative industries," the report concludes, "to supply this content in a way that is culturally expressive and economically profitable" (UNCTAD, 22).

In 2007, the Alliance for the Arts released a similar report focused on New York State, "Arts as an Industry: Their Economic Impact on New York City and New York State." Focusing on both profit and not-for-profit industries in the arts and cultural sector, this report identifies \$904 million in tax revenues to New York City and \$1.2 billion to New York State generated by the Arts Industry alone, just as it documents \$256 million in state tax revenues produced by the specifically non-profit Cultural Sector in New York State. To put things into further perspective, the 2005 expenditures by the Arts Industry in New York State amounted to \$3.4 billion in tourism, \$3.6 billion in motion picture and television production, \$750 million in commercial theater, \$128 million in nonprofit culture (from libraries and museums to concert and performance halls), and \$329 million in Art Galleries and Auction Houses for a 2005 total of \$8.2 billion. Imagine the financial consequences of a strategic pairing of our state's academic research and teaching missions in the arts and humanities with our already robust cultural industries. Then add to this the intangibles of creative enhancement and critical cultural engagement across the shared vectors of industry and academy, which well could lend indirect advantages to parallel creative advances in science and engineering.

New York State has long been a national beacon of intellectual prescience and creative ingenuity. New collaborations between the broadly conceived culture industry and higher education could help to sustain our cultural leadership while lending particularly bright focus on our liberal arts programs, which are now withering from financial and imaginative inattentiveness. This need could not be more timely given the decline of revenues and related economic

challenges faced by the culture industry as well as parallel, and particularly serious, pressures on our prestigious institutions of higher education to scale back offerings in the liberal arts for the sake of meeting the demanding costs of the seemingly more practical fields of science, engineering, and computing. You all might recall reading The New York Times article last February, 25 entitled, "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth," or the Times article this past Sept. 4, "Why College Costs Rise, Even in a Recession," that identifies the fine and performing arts as particularly ripe for reductions in the current climate. Innovative industry-academic partnerships in the cultural economy could enhance institutional investments in the liberal arts while serving the greater cultural and economic need of the New York State.

While the report on "Arts as Industry" compiled by the Alliance for the Arts" acknowledges the vast number of higher education centers of performing arts and museums that contribute to fueling the state's tax base, it is surprisingly quiet about the potential commercial value of numerous projects spawned by our universities and colleges. Complex projects in digital imaging and multimedia production at Cornell's Library and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, for instance, have contributed to industry standards in visual and multimedia delivery and electronic publishing. Cornell Library's Division of Library Information Technologies has blazed the trail for design and implementation of online journals in social science and digital art. It launched on-line projects for faculty e-scholarship and launched innovative repositories such as the eCommons Institutional Repository and the online art exhibition space, CTHEORY Multimedia, all of which have helped set standards in design and interactive video streaming that are now commonplace in New York's design and advertising industry. Especially important is the emergent economy of online interaction as a market product. Free-wheeling experiments with content and design in the cultural laboratories and studios of higher education can lend unforeseen leadership to industry in this rapidly developing area of international growth.

While these and similar projects around the State have tended to receive funding from non-profit sources, they could serve as spawning grounds for industry based projects in the delivery of culture, whether in the high cultural forms of visual art, video art, or classical music or in the mass cultural forms of electronic gaming, online communities, experimental music, etc. New partnerships between academic digital libraries, university presses, and independent writers are developing flexible models for publishing at a time when broader readership benefits both the economy and the culture. In addition to widely publicized collaborations with Google and Microsoft, our state's academic libraries have been fostering a wide range of economic collaborations. The Cornell Library, for example, has entered into a bold collaboration with the Cornell University Press, and the Department of German Studies to publish an online monograph series of German Studies. Most significantly, it will feature a promising combination of print-on-demand and open access that promises to set wider standards in commercial publishing, one of New York's most vital industries. Our state's popular musicians have benefited from similarly flexible models of information delivery developed in our universities, just as its classical artists have partnered with the music industry to make available recordings of historical works, such as the performances of Mozart by Cornell's renowned pianist, Malcolm Bilson, played on his department's unique collection of 18th- and 19th-century instruments. In addition to serving as shooting locations for New York's film and television industries, our academic institutions have been vital in

training actors, broadcasters, and directors and in collaborating with industry in the local celebration and dissemination of cinematic products, such as the internationally renowned Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival at Ithaca College, or the creative series on dance on film sponsored by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

In a less traditional manner, innovative artistic labs in electronic gaming and digital tinkering across the state, such as those at Rochester Institute of Technology, the University of Buffalo, Cornell University, Hunter College, Alfred University, and New York University encourage students and researchers to blend the latest developments in interactive technology with socially responsible forms of communication and cultural interactivity. At Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, researchers in cognitive science are using the facilities of the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center to engineer artificial intelligence characters for virtual worlds. Also important could be wider commercial access to our institutions' growing archives in experimental forms of electronic and digital art, such as the Cornell Library's unique collections in new media art and hip hop music, which should provide commercial partners with a uniquely historical overview of trends in emergent creative disciplines.

A particularly fertile area of creative growth has been in the broad field of ecological art, which has provided artists, architects, and cultural theorists with the opportunity to experiment in tandem with scientists engaged in issues of sustainability. Who would imagine that a researcher in Columbia University's Computer Music Center would have developed a portable artistic project on solar energy? **Douglas Repetto** and **LoVid** (Tali Hinkis and Kyle Lapidus). *Bonding Energy* consists of a set of "Sunsmile" devices that measure solar energy from seven media arts institutions in New York State to measure and send solar data to a central server, including centers at the University of Buffalo, Colgate University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Similar projects merging ecological activism with artistic and technological research highlight the creative contribution made by artists to flexible scientific thinking and to the broader cultural awareness of important scientific issues through experimental means of continuing education. It is higher education's particular sensitivity to the social impact of our cultural products that lends to economic-educational partnerships an important ethical edge, again one of New York State's hallmarks as its artists, designers, musicians, and professors have led the national conversation over the past century for respectful social communication and responsible scientific and corporate practice. These are precisely the sorts of micro projects that have vast potential for broader industrial development.

Such partnerships do not come without challenges and the need to remain flexible about priorities. Industry spin-offs in the cultural economy are likely to be less immediately apparent than, say, in the biological sector since the cultural sector cuts across so many segments of corporate society. One advantage, made clear by the Alliance for the Arts report, is that they are also likely to be much more dispersed widely across the state in tandem with our wide range of educational institutions. This would be to the advantage of a larger number of needy communities who would profit immensely from loosely based start-ups in culture. Consider the case of the migrant digital designer whose primary place of work is on-line (an entire sub-economy of such networked cultural workers has sprouted up in Ithaca where creative workers have traded the cost and stress of urban living for the attractive living conditions of the small country

city) or the economy spawned by the regional cultural center that serves as a creative partner with local universities.

As Director of Cornell's Society for the Humanities, which is the country's oldest and most prestigious residential research center in the humanities, and a partner in the Mellon Foundation's Central New York Humanities Corridor, along with peer centers at the Universities of Syracuse and Rochester, I am particularly sensitive to the need to balance traditional approaches to pedagogy in the arts and the humanities with innovative partnerships with industry. With the assistance of the Mellon Foundation, the Humanities Corridor has fostered cross-institutional collaboration in working groups, which include one on the "Interface of Humanities and Sciences/Technology," which has spawned projects in the digital humanities, in sustainability ethics, and in disability and medical humanities with SUNY Upstate Medical University.

Just as it is important to nurture and privilege the arts and humanities in higher education as incubators of non-quantifiable knowledge and creation, it also makes sense to reap the benefits from their economic potential to the advantage of our students and our communities. By encouraging the growing exchange between the intellectual and industry sectors in culture and the arts, New York State would benefit from refining and pursuing this promise to the advantage of the economy and the continued strengths of the humanities and the arts in our cherished institutions of higher learning.

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