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Sent: Wednesday, October 13, 2021 8:05 AM
To: University Governance <govern@ku.edu>
Cc: Kerr, Barbara Alane <bkerr@ku.edu>
Subject: Letter regarding Art Education MA and BA at KU - Apologies for the delay

Hello University Governance and Barbara,

I am really sorry about the delay in sending this. I have been traveling in Cairo and just returned last night after a nearly 35 hour journey, and practically passed out. While I intended to write this letter earlier, I was basically without meaningful internet access beyond being able to post to instagram, so alas my letter comes late. I've included Barbara Kerr because we've had other back-and-forths about the program. So here is my brief on the Art Education program :

The nature of Art Education and the importance of art educators is vital not only to the University of Kansas but to the state of Kansas. With the defunding of arts initiatives under Sam Brownback and cronies, the arts in the state of Kansas are lacking outside of highly privileged environments. As the flagship university at the University of Kansas, we have a responsibility to be leaders in educating Kansans. With a top education school, it is preposterous to cut a program that has served an enormity of art educators in the state. Are we not here to bring prosperity--cultural and intellectually among other issues like economics--to the state?

I do not come from a lot of economic privilege, but I have been incredibly privileged to have art educators throughout my life who have stood for the things that matter to me. The Department of Visual Art has two faculty--myself and Sarah Gross, who attended the prestigious **public** Bronx High School of Science, which boasts more Nobel prize winners than any other high school in the world. In spite of the focus on STEM and our intellectual capacity to pursue careers in many fields, it is in part because of brilliant art educators who saw potential in us that we find ourselves as successful artists, professors and human beings today. Faculty senator Ani Kokobobo is yet another Bronx High School of Science graduate who has clearly demonstrated through her work and her intellect that by "picking winners" based on the current STEM and business focus of the economic models presented at the University of Kansas fails to account for and acknowledge our public mission to provide a universe of options to Kansas to pursue careers, but also LIVES that are fulfilling and meaningful in whatever ways feel urgent. Despite our clear capacity to "fit in" to the business and STEM tracks that the University is now promoting at the expense of our areas, we are three faculty among many that THRIVE because of our decisions to circumvent obvious and predictable outcomes.

The financial burden of the Visual Art Education program is grossly overstated, and fails to acknowledge that it intersects directly with the Visual Art BFA program. There are no facilities concerns that lead to cost-savings. The failure of the administration to see that students and parents are attracted to Art programs where Art Education is present is a failure to understand the real economic concerns present. Having this option to a more concrete career leads to enrollment across the department. The very public and humiliating cutting of the program has deeply affected our enrollment picture, which was frankly engineered by the University of

Kansas with incomplete and dubious information. It has also impacted the public perception of the Visual Art department's other programs--harm that will take a decade or more to overcome.

The decision to cut the program was made in an environment with a now departed and highly problematic chairperson who failed to listen to those of us with expertise to provide more information for consideration. While serving as Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of Visual Art, I had been developing with our art education faculty= new revenue positive programs for the Visual Art Education M.A./graduate program that would include the following: distance-learning options for working teachers to obtain M.A.'s, distance-learning for continuing ed credits for teachers across the country via unions like the UFT, AFT, Chicago Public Teachers etc., where there is a need, automatic acceptance into graduate licensure program for students with a minimum GPA from BFA programs in the region, and an intensive studio-focused MA program for working teachers that leveraged winter and summer sessions when the classroom spaces are not as active. All of these programs would have been **revenue positive** additions to the department that could have become the "cash cow" of the Visual Art department. Despite my multiple urgings to be included in meetings about the VAE program with administration as DGS where I could elaborate on these plans, the former chairperson continued to fail to include me because of her own ego. It is my understanding that few or none of these projects were ever included or discussed with administration prior to the big "cutting," simply because the former chair was both incompetent and uninterested in saving the program in any meaningful way.

As such, I feel that Visual Art Education is critical from an economic model and from a political and ethical point of view. The real cost of the program is one additional professor until further growth whose cost is nominal compared to the administrative bloat of the institution. Are we really going to fail to see the forest through the trees and the opportunities coming? Are we so deeply jaded about money that we fail to see the value of Art as integral to education from 3K to post-secondary education?

The incredible outpouring of excitement and interest in Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald's portraits of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama are demonstrative of a national community that values at its core the vitality of art. Had it not been for passionate and dedicated art educators, those artists may have never been encouraged to thrive.

Thank you,
Benjamin

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