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Abstracts

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Decolonizing Critical and Creative Thinking: Philosophy, Curriculum and Social Engagement in a Postcolonial University

This proposal examines the role of philosophy in interdisciplinary higher education through a case study of Machakos University's mandatory philosophy course, Critical and Creative Thinking. Offered across all schools, the course institutionalizes philosophy as a foundational intellectual practice, cultivating analytical reasoning, ethical reflection, and transferable cognitive capacities among students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. It exemplifies philosophy's potential to mediate between disciplines and engage critically with societal challenges—including justice, governance, public health, and environmental responsibility—within a postcolonial African context.

In practice, however, Critical and Creative Thinking has historically been shaped predominantly by an analytic orientation, emphasizing formal logic, argument analysis, and conceptual clarity. While these tools strengthen cognitive rigor, their largely abstract and decontextualized application risks disconnecting philosophical reflection from the socio-historical and material realities of postcolonial societies. Consequently, philosophy's critical and ethical capacities remain under-realized.

Methodologically, this study undertakes a close textual analysis of the Critical and Creative Thinking course syllabus to examine how philosophical content is framed, justified, and structured within an interdisciplinary curriculum. The analysis highlights implicit philosophical commitments embedded in the course and considers their potential implications for students' ethical judgment, social consciousness, and capacity for public reasoning.

Normatively, the paper advocates a decolonial reorientation of Critical and Creative Thinking toward socially engaged philosophical pedagogy. Drawing on postcolonial and liberationist frameworks, it emphasizes historical consciousness, ethical responsibility to marginalized communities, and sustained critique of structural inequality. An alternative model is proposed, grounded in dialogical pedagogy, problem-centered inquiry, and community engagement, enabling meaningful interaction between philosophy, medicine, environmental studies, the social sciences, and the arts. While grounded in Machakos University, the study offers broader insights for postcolonial universities seeking to reclaim philosophy as a critical, ethically responsive, and socially transformative academic practice.

Alexandra Hausstein
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany

Liberal Arts Education at a Technical University in Germany: Institutional Challenges of Bridging Knowledge Cultures in Liberal Arts and Sciences Programs

In recent years, German technical universities (Technische Universitäten, TUs) have increasingly explored the integration of humanities and social sciences education to cultivate graduates who combine deep technical expertise with critical thinking, ethical awareness,

and societal understanding. However, the implementation of liberal arts at technical universities is still relatively new. Many institutions, still concerned about the perceived loss of disciplinary depth caused by transforming traditional diploma curricula into dense and overloaded bachelor's programs, face significant challenges in designing new curricula. In engineering programs, these challenges include determining where to incorporate courses that develop typical SSH (social sciences and humanities) competencies, how to source them, and how to integrate them effectively into technical curricula.

For liberal arts programs, challenges arise when incorporating the sciences into their curricula, navigating substantial cultural and epistemological differences between technical and humanistic knowledge paradigms, and resisting the temptation to serve merely as a "lieferando" for quick knowledge and ready-made methods, particularly in areas requiring reflective and critical thinking, contextual understanding, social responsibility, and ethical decision-making.

Unlike traditional liberal arts institutions, technical universities are often oriented toward specialized, discipline-specific training, emphasizing engineering, natural sciences, and applied research. Faculty and students from both liberal arts and technical fields frequently encounter tensions due to differing methodologies, evaluative criteria, and notions of relevance. Without deliberate attention through curriculum design and institutional support, these contrasting approaches and knowledge cultures can result in resistance, misunderstandings, or superficial engagement.

This paper examines the challenges of bridging these knowledge cultures, focusing on institutional structures and strategies, concepts of knowledge transfer, flexible curriculum design, student learning experiences, and issues of disciplinary identity formation. The case study of the Liberal Arts and Sciences program at KIT highlights both the opportunities and obstacles in implementing liberal arts modules, interdisciplinary seminars, and integrated degree programs.

Helen Goodman
Bath Spa University, UK

'I want to be known as a whole human being': empathy and liberal arts in education, from citizenship to healthcare

Barack Obama once said, 'the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position as citizen, the most important stuff I've learned I think I've learned from novels. It has to do with empathy' (2014). It is widely thought that the liberal arts, particularly literature and philosophy, have the power to develop empathy and emotional intelligence in students as they inhabit the experiences and emotions of others through storytelling, creating a deeper understanding of human feelings and behaviour (e.g. see Bal and Veltkamp (2013), EmpathyLab, and Havi Carel's work). In contrast, scientific education, at least since Plato, has emphasised the need for objectivity and the subjugation of the emotions (Denham, 2024).

While strict detachment may be effective for some aspects of medicine, it can cause harm in civic engagement, policy, social responsibility, and patient outcomes. One strand of the medical humanities seeks, as the name suggests, to humanise medics. Patients frequently report that clinical encounters leave them feeling like an inanimate case study: their concerns are dismissed or life-changing experiences are treated as mundane (White, Khunti et al, 2024). This is especially pertinent when conditions or treatments are described, or bad news is broken about diagnoses or prognoses. As one patient put it, 'I want to be known as a whole human being' (Knorring, Lehti et al, 2025). One might think that empathising could overburden clinicians, causing stress and burnout, but the WHO reports the opposite (2018).

This paper examines the efficacy of attempts to build empathy through interdisciplinary education, developing more compassionate citizens, and specifically medics. Conceiving medical humanities approaches as liberal arts innovations, it explores how empathy might be incorporated into medical training. This has already been implemented at various institutions (e.g. Columbia University), drawing on 'narrative medicine' to revolutionise clinician experiences and patient care.

Douglas Andrews
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Capacity Building for Aspirant School Leaders in Rwandan and South African Universities: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Perspective

South Africa and Rwanda face persistent challenges in ensuring equitable access to high-quality postgraduate education in school leadership. This paper presents findings from an ongoing research project designed to address these challenges through innovative, entrepreneurial pedagogical strategies and the integration of digital technologies into postgraduate leadership curricula. The initiative responds to evolving demands of educational leadership in an era increasingly shaped by generative artificial intelligence and complexity, while aligning with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The project centres on implementing self-directed learning (SDL) methodologies, Open Educational Resources (OERs), and Open Educational Practices (OEPs) to democratize access to quality leadership education. This pedagogical approach represents a deliberate shift from traditional lecture-based instruction toward student-centred, active learning paradigms that better prepare leaders for the complexities of modern educational environments.

A three-month capacity-building program was implemented with 40 Master-of-Education students specializing in School Leadership at a South African university and 30 students in a comparable program at a Rwandan university in Kigali. Participants engaged in intensive professional learning focused on SDL-based methodologies, OER integration, and the establishment of sustainable OEPs within their institutional contexts.

The intervention's effectiveness is being evaluated using a mixed-methods design incorporating pre- and post-intervention assessments. Quantitative data were collected via Likert-scale questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Preliminary findings indicate strong participant interest in adopting innovative pedagogical modalities, including inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, augmented reality applications, and OEPs, to enhance their effectiveness as pedagogically responsive school leaders.

The study employs Engeström's Activity-Systems Model, grounded in Cultural-Historical-Activity-Theory, to examine systemic tensions and contradictions impeding effective leadership practice. This framework investigates how capacity-building experiences incorporating inquiry-based learning and OERs can equip aspiring school leaders with an entrepreneurial mindset to navigate the 'wicked problems' characteristic of contemporary educational leadership.

Ingrid Forsler
Södertörn University, Sweden

Digging (into) Media: Media Archaeology and Technology and Liberal Arts Education in a Digital Age

In an era marked by rapid digitalisation, liberal arts education can play an important role in supporting critical, creative, and historically grounded perspectives on media technologies. This presentation explores media archaeology as a pedagogical approach for enabling such discussions about the role of digital technologies in contemporary society, drawing on the Södertörn Media Archaeological Collections (SMS) as a hands-on educational resource. The collection was established in 2024 and is located in a dedicated space for teaching and experimentation at the university. It consists of historical media objects that are actively used in teaching across all levels of education, from collaborative projects with local high schools to bachelor’s and master’s courses and doctoral training.

The pedagogical approach used in SMS is centred around media-archaeological “excavations” in different directions, that can each be used to explore perspectives that are central for (critical) liberal arts education. Rather than treating media history as a linear progression toward the digital present, this hands-on engagement with older media technologies invites students to explore media development as a contingent and culturally negotiated process. Digging inward, students examine the materiality of media and how

technological form shape cultural and social practices. Digging outward, they connect specific objects to broader infrastructural, economic, and political conditions. Digging backward, they uncover the non-linear and often arbitrary pathways of media history, highlighting forgotten alternatives and contested developments. Finally, digging forward, the collections serve as starting point for imagining alternative media futures beyond dominant narratives of technological inevitability. By showing how material engagement with older media technologies and objects can cultivate critical thinking, historical awareness, and imaginative agency, this paper contributes to the pedagogies of liberal arts education in the digital age.

Petter Falk
Södertörn University, Sweden

Interoperability may be smart – but is it wise? Phronesis and/in the data mobility of governments

Over the past decade, governments, academia, and industry have increasingly framed data interoperability as a hallmark of "smart" governance (ESV, 2017; Cisco, 2019; Harvard Business Review, 2021; European Commission, 2021; Swedish Government, 2025). Defined as the ability of different information systems, organizations, and administrative domains to exchange, integrate, and reuse digital data seamlessly, from social media to AI, interoperability is widely regarded as "smart" because it promises governments efficiency and enhanced data-driven decision-making across institutional boundaries.

By these measures, interoperability may indeed appear smart. Yet an important question remains: is it wise?

Drawing on the classical notion of phronesis (φρόνησις), which emphasizes situated knowledge, judgment, and lived experience, this presentation highlights three practical and logical shortcomings in contemporary logics of how governments make data from its citizens interoperable. For one, public sector actors increasingly mobilize ethical arguments to legitimize data flows across organizational boundaries, yet these claims often remain unspecified, asserting that practices are "ethical" without clarifying which ethical framework is being invoked (van Dijk et al., 2021). Secondly, what i frequently overlooked is how data are produced in the first place (Kitchin, 2014; Loukissas, 2019), and whether data generated in one administrative domain can meaningfully represent the situations, needs, and expectations of citizens when transferred to another (Ruppert et al., 2017; Lee & Ribes, 2025). Lastsly, interoperability entails that individuals are increasingly rendered visible and legible as new forms of data-driven subjects, often detached from their social and institutional contexts—an issue that is seldom reflected upon in public discourse (Kitchin & Lauriault, 2014; Ruppert et al., 2021; Falk, 2024).

Commenting this critique, drawing on perspectives from the democratic traditions of the liberal arts (e.g., Dewey, 1916) as well as ongoing ethnographic research, the presentation also provides examples of approaches that enable more critical and context-sensitive judgment in data mobility. By calling for “wise interoperability,” the presentation demonstrates how a phronesis perspective can foster more humanistic and democratic approaches to data mobility, inspired by liberal arts, that foreground lived experience, reflection, and meaningful social change.

Balew Demissie
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Exploring Nature in Ethiopian Children's Literature: Environmental Stories and Rural Memory

This study examines the representation of nature in Ethiopian children’s literature, with a particular focus on environmental narratives and rural memory. Through textual and thematic analysis of selected children’s stories, the research explores how natural landscapes, animals, agricultural life, and human–nature relationships are depicted for young readers. Special attention is given to how rural memories – such as traditional farming practices, communal life, seasonal cycles, and indigenous ecological knowledge – are preserved and transmitted through literary narratives. The study argues that Ethiopian children’s literature serves not only as a tool for environmental education but also as a cultural archive that safeguards rural experiences and values in the face of urbanization, climate crisis, and social change. The findings suggest that these stories promote environmental awareness, respect for nature, and a sense of continuity between past and present rural life. By foregrounding rural memory, the literature helps shape children’s environmental ethics and cultural identity, highlighting the role of storytelling in sustaining ecological consciousness and intergenerational knowledge in Ethiopia.

Gabrielle Branche
Concordia University, Canada

Blurring the Lines: Embodied Interdisciplinarity from Secondary Schooling to Liberal Institutions

This paper presents an autoethnographic case study of Concordia University’s Interdisciplinary Humanities PhD program, examining both the strengths and structural challenges of interdisciplinary education within liberal arts institutions. As a first year student in the program, the author is able to examine the program from within and use her own research-creation practice as a site of analysis. The author’s research explores how

performing arts and interactive media can be integrated into middle school mathematics education to foster embodied multimodal learning. This work argues for a more holistic inclusive pedagogical model which introduces liberal arts formats in pre-university settings.

The paper positions research-creation as a method that bridges humanities, arts and educational theory. Something that is only possible through liberal arts education. It demonstrates how embodied and creative approaches to mathematics education not only disrupt traditional hierarchies between arts and sciences, it also prepares students to address complex global challenges by enhancing creativity and overall problem solving skills. This paper contends that interdisciplinary training in the liberal arts equips scholars to navigate and integrate diverse knowledge systems, an increasingly urgent necessity in contemporary education.

The author also highlights the difficult transition from disciplinary secondary schooling to interdisciplinary post-secondary environments. Drawing from lived academic experience and speculative curriculum design, the paper concludes by proposing strategies for strengthening pathways between secondary education and liberal arts universities. The author argues that intentional integration of liberal arts learning throughout the educational stages is essential for preparing students to think collaboratively across disciplines. Through this case study, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions about how universities can meaningfully bridge disciplinary boundaries to respond to pressing global concerns.

Sabine Spangenberg
Richmond American
University London, UK

Sustainability Education as a Common Good within the Liberal Arts Context

This paper presents a case study of how one American liberal arts university in the UK defines and embeds sustainability as both an institutional learning outcome and a requirement across all taught degrees. It examines the drivers behind this development, focusing on the influence of regulatory expectations from US accreditation bodies and UK quality assurance and oversight organisations. The study outlines how programme teams mapped learning outcomes to foster students' understanding of sustainability as a common good and subsequently adapted their curricula. It also identifies indicators of effective sustainability education and evaluates empirical evidence against institutionally defined benchmarks.

The paper analyses criteria and rubrics used to collect direct evidence of student learning and assesses how well these align with the institution's aim to cultivate students' awareness of sustainability as a shared societal responsibility. It argues that the UK Quality Assurance Agency's 2021 guidance on Education for Sustainable Development, developed with

Advance HE, has been a significant catalyst for curriculum innovation and the integration of sustainability across programmes.

The case study is further situated within a public economics framework that views higher education as a public good. It highlights the concept of conditional self-interest and its potential benefits for society, demonstrating how a lightly structured institutional framework—typical of the liberal arts model—can generate positive social outcomes. Applied to sustainability education, this approach encourages learners to recognise their dual identity as individuals and members of a collective, motivating action toward the common good.

The paper concludes by reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the liberal arts model in supporting higher education's role as a public good, with particular attention to its capacity to promote sustainability education.

M.J. Jesu Pudumai Doss
Saint Paul University,
Ottawa, Canada

Empowering Human Rights through Fraternity: Some Perspectives for Legal Education of the Young

"The word fraternity or brotherhood is a contentious term now. Rising instances of lynching make us wonder where this hatred and anger are coming from. There seems to be no sympathy left in society", so lamented the human rights activist Harsh Mander, writing on the rising incidences of intolerance, discrimination and violence, especially in India. Such observation might have worldwide inferences as well. In the first part of the article, an analysis of the growing challenges to fraternity and human rights in the Indian context – applicable globally – is presented, not only in public forums but also in administrative, legal, and judicial actions. Based on recent Catholic magisterium, particularly Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti, the second part gathers some ecclesial ideas and insights on human rights and fraternity around a few nuclei. Lastly, inspired by these beautiful lyrics of Bob Dylan in his enigmatic song Blowin' in the Wind, "Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head, and pretend that he just doesn't see? … And how many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry? Yes, and how many deaths will it take 'til he knows that too many people have died?", a three-level proposal for educating young people to live and promote human rights in the context of fraternity in today's Indian and global scenario is presented.

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Veronica Bremer
Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany

Cultivating Civic Consciousness Through Immersive Engagement with Public Art

What happens when students' first academic experience is not a lecture hall, but a confrontation with art that challenges whose stories are told in their city's streets? Drawing on insights from Urban ARTotale Re:New, a street art initiative integrating commissioned artists into Leuphana Uuniversity's 2026 Opening Week, this case study demonstrates how witnessing and engaging with contemporary artistic processes serves as a catalyst for critical citizenship from students' first moments on campus.

Urban ARTotale Re:New revitalizes a groundbreaking 2009 project by strategically embedding public art creation within academic structures, transforming cultural events into sustained civic learning. Incoming students engage directly with international street artists producing site-specific works across campus through dialogue, documentation, and participation in performances and installations. This immersive exposure challenges students to question whose voices occupy public space, what values shape their communities, and how art can disrupt dominant narratives.

The project's innovation lies in repositioning students from passive observers to engaged witnesses and critical analysts of artistic intervention in public space. Through documentation of artistic processes, intensive exchange with creators, and collaboration with each other in small groups, students confront fundamental questions about power, representation, and social equity embedded in their own local landscape.

This case study will reveal insights from artist-student exchanges, documented creative processes, and student reflections on encountering art as social commentary within their daily environment. By examining specific artistic interventions, including murals, installations, stencils, and performances, as well as community responses, I will illustrate how liberal arts education can prepare students for democratic participation through experiential learning that bridges academic inquiry with real-world social transformation.This model offers replicable strategies for institutions seeking to develop socially conscious graduates through meaningful engagement with artistic activism.

Jessica Gustafsson & Maria Kyriakidou
Södertörn University, Sweden

Pedagogies of Global Media

Sweden is nowadays a post-migrant society; however, this diversity is not reflected in the Swedish media (Frigyes, 2021). In recent years, anti-immigrant sentiment has increased and, as a result, the public discourse on immigration has become much harsher (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021). The ethnically diverse suburbs of Sweden's largest cities and the youth residing therein, have become symbols of failed integration in the public debate (Sernhede et al., 2019). One of these suburbs, Alby, is home to the media house Fanzingo. They work together with marginalised youth to diversify the media and improve the representation of marginalised youth. The objective of this paper is to explore how Fanzingo works to give voice to marginalised youth in their quest to diversify Swedish media. This is achieved by analysing 12 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in Fanzingo's project Young Correspondents and adopting the ICA model of participatory media (Gustafsson, forthcoming) and the theoretical concepts of voice (Couldry 2010), listening (Dreher & de Souza 2021), and participation (Carpentier 2011).

Samuel A. Nyanchoga, Melvine C. Lilechi & Frida N. Mutui
Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

Can Liberal Arts Education Action Change Under Repressive Regimes in Africa?

This paper examines the potential of liberal arts education to serve as a catalyst for social and political transformation within repressive regimes in Africa. While liberal arts curricula are traditionally associated with critical thinking, civic engagement, and pluralistic discourse, their capacity to instigate meaningful change in authoritarian contexts remains contested. Drawing on case studies from selected African nations characterized by restricted political freedoms, this study interrogates how liberal arts pedagogy emphasizing critical inquiry, ethical reasoning, and interdisciplinary analysis interacts with state control over higher education, censorship, and surveillance. The paper explores tensions between institutional autonomy and government oversight, the role of faculty and student agency in resisting epistemic repression, and the extent to which liberal arts graduates translate classroom critical consciousness into civic or political action. It also considers counterarguments suggesting that liberal arts education may be co-opted, diluted, or rendered symbolic under authoritarian conditions rather than transformative. Employing a qualitative comparative approach, the paper synthesizes existing scholarship, policy documents, and illustrative institutional examples to assess both the emancipatory potential and structural limitations of liberal arts education as an agent of change. The paper concludes that while liberal arts education can cultivate dispositions conducive to reform, its transformative impact is heavily mediated by broader political, economic, and institutional constraints.

Keywords: liberal arts education, repressive regimes, Africa, civic agency, higher education

Samuel A. Nyanchoga, Melvine C. Lilechi & Frida N. Mutui
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Cultivating Ecological Imagination: Global Arts as a Catalyst for Environmental Sustainability

This paper argues that liberal arts function as a distinct and necessary catalyst for environmental sustainability. Liberal arts education converts abstract ecological data into narrative, emotion, identity, and memory, as well as the cultural materials through which societies deliberate and act. Using a qualitative, desk-based comparative method, the paper draws on ecocriticism, environmental-justice theory, and decolonial political ecology of art to examine relevant case studies from the region. It pays particular attention to African and Kenyan artistic and oral traditions, both as underrepresented contributors to global environmental discourse and as sites where indigenous ecological knowledge and international climate governance are in productive tension. The paper concludes that the liberal arts are "in action" for sustainability not because they replace scientific and policy instruments, but because they supply the narrative, ethical, and affective infrastructure without which technical solutions struggle to acquire public meaning and legitimacy. It recommends that universities, cultural practitioners, and policymakers integrate arts-based environmental education and cultural climate governance.

Keywords: environmental humanities; ecocriticism; liberal arts; environmental justice; African environmental literature; climate fiction; decolonial art; sustainability

Melvine C. Lilechi, Frida N. Mutui & Samuel A. Nyanchoga
Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

From Encounter to Engagement: Global Arts and the Formation of Responsible Citizenry

Civic education is conventionally delivered through law, institutional civics, and formal political instruction, yet these approaches struggle to cultivate the empathy, critical consciousness, and capacity for dialogue across difference that responsible citizenship in plural and globally interconnected societies requires. This paper argues that global arts such as literature, film, music, theatre, visual art, and digital creative practice constitute a distinctive mechanism of civic and ethical formation because they place individuals inside encounters with identities, histories, and social realities that formal instruction narrates only from outside. The paper describes the movement from exposure through interpretation, empathy, critical reflection, and dialogue to participation. The paper examines representational mechanisms through theater, storytelling, music, and drama as part of artistic engagement in building responsible citizenship. The paper concludes that Liberal Arts

higher education in Kenya and Africa can be a platform for civic education that is well structured in curricular development.

Keywords: global arts; responsible citizenry; civic education

Benard Lango Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya	*Cultivating Environmental Stewardship Through Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts Pedagogy: Building Sustainable Mindsets for Community Resilience*

This research proposal investigates how interdisciplinary liberal arts education can serve as a catalyst for environmental sustainability and community resilience. Contemporary environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, resource inequity, and environmental injustice are complex and interconnected, demanding responses that extend beyond technical and scientific solutions. This study posits that liberal arts education, with its emphasis on critical inquiry, ethical reasoning, cultural literacy, and civic engagement, is uniquely positioned to cultivate sustainable mindsets and bridge the persistent gap between knowledge and action in sustainability efforts. Grounded in environmental philosophy, socio-ecological systems thinking, and community-engaged scholarship, the study will adopt a mixed-methods research design. It combines (1) a systematic analysis of selected higher education liberal arts curricula that integrate sustainability themes, and (2) qualitative data drawn from student experiences and community stakeholder engagements. Through these methods, the research will examine pedagogical models that intentionally embed environmental ethics, indigenous ecological knowledge, and civic responsibility into liberal arts learning outcomes. In addition, the study will document case narratives of student-led community sustainability initiatives to illustrate how liberal arts education can translate theoretical learning into tangible, locally relevant environmental action. By framing sustainability as a multidimensional and relational practice requiring interdisciplinarity, reflective judgment, and collective action, this research is intended to contribute to broader scholarly debates on the evolving role of liberal arts education in addressing global environmental challenges. The anticipated findings will offer practical and conceptual pathways for strengthening sustainability integration within liberal arts frameworks, ultimately supporting the development of learners as ethically grounded and civically engaged agents of transformative socio-environmental change.

KEYWORDS: Liberal Arts Education; Environmental Sustainability; Interdisciplinary pedagogy; Community Engagement; Socio-Ecological Systems.

Gabriel Vieira Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia	*Narrative Sovereignty: A Case Study on a Methodology for the Co-Creation of Films about Experiences of Racism and Discrimination with Indigenous Youth in Canada*

This presentation proposes an exploration of how liberal arts education can foster social action through collaborative filmmaking with Indigenous youth in Canada. It is grounded in

four interconnected axes: narrative sovereignty, the TECAC methodology, the SBCC framework, and a concrete process of co-creation with young people from four First Nations communities. Together, these components show how film can become both a pedagogical tool and a catalyst for community-led change.

Narrative sovereignty is understood here as the capacity of communities to define, create, and circulate their own stories without external mediation or appropriation. In the context of liberal arts, this principle challenges traditional academic hierarchies and invites institutions to become facilitators rather than owners of knowledge. The TECAC methodology (Theoretical, Experiential, Critical, Affective, and Collective) structures our work with youth through cycles that combine conceptual discussion, hands-on film practice, critical reflection, emotional literacy, and group decision-making. This approach enables participants to connect personal experience with broader social questions.

In parallel, the SBCC (Social and Behaviour Change Communication) framework provides tools to design and evaluate media processes aimed at transforming attitudes and practices within communities. Applied to film co-creation, SBCC helps youth identify priority issues, target audiences, desired changes, and appropriate narrative strategies. The proposed paper will present results from a film co-creation process carried out with youth from four First Nations communities in Canada, highlighting ethical challenges, pedagogical strategies, and community impacts. By articulating narrative sovereignty, TECAC, and SBCC within liberal arts education, the presentation argues for a model of socially engaged pedagogy where young Indigenous filmmakers become protagonists of their own stories and agents of local transformation.

Carlos Galeano
Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia

From Aesthetics to Ethics: Searching for the Chora in Fernando González's 'Viaje a Pie'

This article is based on an updated reading of 'Viaje a Pie' [Journey on Foot], written by the Colombian philosopher Fernando González (1895-1964). It concerns a book where the modesty of its length does not account for the depth of the ideas outlined therein. It is by no means an attempt to carry out an analysis centred on the characteristics of the text, a matter which has already been addressed by various authors from their specific disciplinary fields. Rather, the aim is to find possible interpretations of his reflections from the perspective of contemporary art and philosophy.

An attempt will be made to shape the guiding intuition: Viaje a Pie can also be read as a text that reviews and exposes the ultimate quality of the idiosyncrasy of the people inhabiting

the Colombian mountains. It is not merely a matter of performing an exercise in Chorography, halting at the description of the cultural characteristics of the people in their geographical environment, but more properly of observing how much of that deep and indeterminate substrate can be brought to the surface, what vein of meanings can be excavated. The journey cannot take place without aesthesis, for it demands sensory knowledge in its broadest sense. Yet, it is not exhausted in this generative aspect either, for in attentive wandering, the thought proper to philosophy is activated.

And its goal, one might ask? For in the sense intuited here, it seeks to reach an understanding of the quality proper to the individual in their environment, which clearly fosters the practical becoming of ethics.

Martha Wiggin
Saint Paul University, Canada

Transforming Mental Health Pedagogy in Response to Climate Change

The Lancet identifies the climate crisis as the most significant health threat of the 21st century, with profound mental health impacts that disproportionately affect populations already marginalized. These impacts extend beyond clients seeking mental health care to include therapists themselves, influencing their capacity to respond ethically, effectively, and with ecological awareness. Despite the escalating need for climate-informed mental health support, higher education programs in Ontario, Canada do not include climate change within the core curriculum for psychotherapists. This gap represents a critical opportunity for interdisciplinary approaches that reflect the complexity of the climate crisis, strengthen ecological literacy, support the decolonization of psychotherapy, and cultivate frameworks for community resilience and planetary citizenship. Pedagogy can- and should evolve to prepare future therapists for practice in a climate-altered world.

Leandro Ernesto Maia
Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Brazil

Agimos – The Creative Industry Agency at Pelotas University, Brazil: The Role of Universities in Cultural Policies and Social Change

Cultural policies are at the centre of new perspectives on social change, sustainability and economic development. How can universities act to develop, implement and evaluate cultural policies? The present work introduces the "Cultural Production and Policies" project at Universidade Federal de Pelotas/Brasil, joining several actions under the umbrella name "Agimos", acronym for Agência de Indústria Criativa e Mobilização Social [Creative Industry and Social Mobilisation Agency]. According to Agimos' principles, four dimensions need to be connected with the aim of providing concrete solutions regarding cultural policies: a) observatory, b) incubation office, c) advisory and consultation services and d) public policies lab. This is a cyclic and spiral scheme that allows distinct research methodologies in action, also considering the field of cultural production and its implications regarding cultural

capitals and habitus. Considering a project developed into a Centre of Arts with undergraduate and graduate courses in distinct areas of knowledge including Music, Acting, Dance, Movies, Games, Design and Visual Arts, it is imperative to highlight the protagonism of artists and cultural community and their thoughts and needs regarding cultural public policies. As results, Agimos and the Cultural Production and Policies project has contributed with legal documents such as The Cultural Plan for Pelotas City (local law); The Music Sector Plan (State of Rio Grande do Sul), as well as academic articles, awards, festivals and other actions for democratising culture and local artists. Through mobilising cultural sector, Agimos has contributed to establish institutional practices to improve democracy and provide spot for non-colonial and counter-hegemonic speeches.

Carolyne S. Mudeje Buya
Technical University of Kenya

Gendered Institutional Practices and Academic Freedom in Kenyan Universities: Implications for Liberal Arts Education and Social Transformation

Academic freedom is central to higher education and to the liberal arts tradition, which seeks to cultivate critical inquiry, civic responsibility, ethical reflection, and socially engaged knowledge. It provides the conditions under which scholars and students can question assumptions, explore diverse perspectives, and contribute meaningfully to public life. However, the realisation of academic freedom within universities in is mostly uneven and conditioned by institutional governance structures, prevailing cultural expectations, and gendered power relations. These factors influence how freely scholars are able to teach, research, publish, and participate in institutional decision-making, shaping not only the scope of intellectual inquiry but also whose voices are recognised and sustained within the academic community. This paper examines how gendered institutional practices influence the exercise of academic freedom in two university contexts in Kenya, that is, one faith-based and one secular, within an ongoing comparative qualitative study. The research employs semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and institutional document analysis with women academics to investigate how promotion systems, workload distribution, participation in governance, and moral or reputational regulation may affect the ability to teach, research, publish, and contribute to public and institutional debate. While empirical analysis is in progress, the study is expected to clarify how institutional ethos and gendered norms shape scholarly participation and the conditions under which diverse forms of knowledge can emerge. The paper contributes to global discussions on how universities can support critical thought, civic engagement, and socially responsive scholarship by linking gender-inclusive academic freedom to the transformative aims of liberal arts education, The study offers an African perspective on strengthening academic freedom as a catalyst for intellectual and social change.

Key words: Academic freedom; Liberal arts education; Gender and higher education; Institutional governance; Kenya

Steven Corey Columbia College Chicago, USA	*'We Don't Need No Education': The Liberal Arts as Scapegoat and Catalyst for Social Change*

This presentation examines the state of liberal arts education in the United States within the context of the current assault on higher education by an array of social critics and politicians who question the viability of a traditional college degree. Despite the well-documented success of a bachelor's degree to improve a graduate's earning potential, public opinion surveys reveal that most Americans now believe that a college degree is not worth the cost of attendance. Why the cognitive disconnect? And what does the lack of faith in a college education mean for the very foundation of American higher education, the liberal arts?

The heavily weaponized nature of educational funding in the United States has reinforced a false dichotomy between what critics see as the socially irrelevant and low economic value of the "soft skills" cultivated in the liberal arts versus the so-called essential "hard skills" taught in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. In short, the liberal arts are seen as antiquated, irrelevant, and a drain on the economy. The public failure to understand and acknowledge the power of a higher education degree in general has serious consequences for the future of the liberal arts. Across the country, public and private colleges and universities alike are shedding once popular liberal arts degrees that offer viable pathways for social mobility and economic security.

Not all is lost for the liberal arts. Indeed, this presentation will highlight the inherit ability and appeal of the liberal arts to restore the public's trust in colleges and universities. Examples will be provided of how institutions are recasting their liberal arts curriculum to align student interests with market demand, thus reasserting the liberal arts as a wise investment and foundation for a moral, ethical, and socially responsible education.

Sheku Fofanah Bath Spa University, UK	*Bridging the PhD Gap: A Collaborative HE Project for Human Capital Development*

Background and Context: Agenda 2063 is Africa's strategic framework for continental transformation which places human capital development at the core of its vision for a prosperous and integrated Africa. This Africa wide ambition reflects Sierra Leone's national development strategy framed as The Big Five Game Changers. The strategy identifies Human Capital Development as a critical pillar for economic growth and resilience. However, a significant obstacle to achieving these goals is the severe shortage of highly qualified academics across Sierra Leone's tertiary education sector. A recent survey by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) revealed that only 14% of university faculty hold a PhD, a deficit that undermines research capacity, innovation, and the quality of higher education in Sierra Leone. This challenge is not unique to Sierra Leone and demonstrates a continent-wide investment in advanced skills to drive sustainable growth and development.

Purpose and Objective: This project provides opportunity for a strategic framework for international collaboration and partnership designed to address the PhD shortage in Sierra Leone and to serve as a replicable model for other African nations. The model will take the form of a joint hybrid PhD programme, co-developed by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) in Sierra Leone, national universities, and international partners from the UK's African Research Network including Bath Spa University and potential GALA members interested to participate.

Methodology: This proposed model is derived from findings of a Bath Spa University working visit team to Sierra Leone from the 4th to 7th August 2025. The visiting delegation conducted consultations with key stakeholders - MTHE, the Chief Minister, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), and 5 major universities - University of Sierra Leone (Fourah Bay College (FBC) and the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM), the University of Management and Technology (UNIMTECH), the University of Makeni (UniMak) and Milton Margai Technical University.

Findings and Recommendations: The high-level ministerial meetings and institutional discussions revealed a strong consensus among all stakeholders on the urgent need for a joint hybrid PhD programme. The proposed model leverages shared resources, joint supervision, joint viva voce examinations, and the establishment of a collaborative

research centre. MTHE has pledged full support and political will to coordinate the initiative, with a pilot programme aimed for launch by 2026/27 academic year.

Significance and Implications: This model demonstrates a practical, actionable approach to supporting Agenda 2063's vision for higher education into tangible outcomes. It addresses a critical capacity gap and offers a replicable blueprint for other African nations facing similar challenges. The successful implementation of this initiative could help strengthen the continent's research and innovation ecosystem.

Ann-Marie McCormack
Bath Spa University, UK

Travel Podcasting: Is there a new way of gathering authentic storytelling from diverse people and educators across the world?

My paper will explore how travel podcasting can be a tool for authentic and diverse storytelling, creating global awareness and promoting global citizenship. ‘Parents Gap Year’ is a 15-part world travel audio podcast series, created and edited by myself, a senior lecturer in filmmaking and creative writing, with my photographer husband. My inspiration was to record people’s life stories, to delve deeper and add meaning to my travel experience by engaging with a diverse range of people.

I will play 3 minutes of clips to demonstrate my serendipitous approach to interviewing through a variety of voices and stories: a Muslim businesswoman in Lombok explaining what it’s like to work in a hijab in 40-degree heat, a Filipino who lost three family members during

Covid, a Cambodian waitress who's saving up the £600 for her 1–year old daughter to go to university, and a Dean of The Faculty of Arts from Sri Lanka, educated in England, who explains the differences in university education.

I learnt from Seasons 1 & 2 that my position in the storytelling is on behalf of the listener; I find the contributors' and my views enriched by their conversation and the audience is enriched by extension. In season 3, I also included interviews with global educators in liberal arts and international students to focus on worldwide education.

As a participatory storyteller my ambition is to help people to understand each other better interculturally, through individual stories revealing our differences but more importantly our similarities. By measuring analytics, we can see global engagement in terms of numbers of listeners and locations worldwide. However, assessing how listeners' perceptions change and the impact of this in critical action is more challenging, so I am seeking feedback from conference participants on new ways we can measure meaningful impact. I will also reflect on 'in situ recording' as a new model of podcasting, steering away from studio-based interviews, and how podcasting itself can be a new form of informal education with a wider global reach through online distribution.

While in Nairobi, I also plan to record interviews with locals and conference participants.

Giulia Conti University of Parma, Italy	*Playful Urban Aesthetics as Civic Infrastructure: Joy, Belonging, and Social Responsibility in the City*

Urban aesthetics are often treated as matters of taste or surface appearance. This paper reframes them as civic infrastructure: visual, material, and experiential affordances that condition how people inhabit public space, recognize one another, and imagine collective life. Building on Ingrid Fetell Lee's work on joy as an outcome of design (2018), I argue that "joyful" and playful interventions can support civic engagement by making public environments more legible, welcoming, and participatory, especially in contexts marked by inequality and exclusion.

Recent scholarship at the intersection of play and urbanism offers a productive vocabulary for linking aesthetics to civic practice, including the Playable City (Nijholt, 2016), the Ludic City (Stevens, 2007), and related notions of playful or gamified urbanism (Tawfique et al., 2025). Synthesizing these strands, the paper shows how playful aesthetics, expressed through color, rhythm, pattern, and interaction design, can function as low-threshold invitations to public participation. Such interventions can facilitate encounter across social boundaries, reduce perceived intimidation in public settings, and contribute to "safe enough" spaces for dialogue, care, and shared use.

Conceptually, the paper connects aesthetic experience to social responsibility by treating design as a civic pedagogy: it teaches who belongs, what forms of presence are permitted, and which publics are anticipated. Empirically, the contribution is structured around illustrative cases of small-scale urban interventions and their communicative dynamics (on-site participation, social media circulation, and public discourse). The central claim is that playful and joyful design can become a tool for social equity, enabling communities to rehearse shared futures through accessible, emotionally resonant public spaces.

Andrew Brogan
Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany

Educational Communities of Debt: Freedom and Responsibility

Creating educational spaces which promote freedom and responsibility is central to higher education, but whose understandings of freedom and responsibility are we pursuing? The higher education sector is rife with neo-liberal and capitalist logics which frame freedom and responsibility in learning as an individual and competitive endeavour, hampering open discourse and creating a specific form of learning environment. What if we re-frame freedom and responsibility as a community practice rooted relations of debt?

This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of debt as a communal bond by drawing on a combination of Roberto Esposito and David Graeber. Esposito introduces the concept of communitas, taking us through the original root meanings of the word and arguing that community cannot be defined as a property or a territory held in common, but is instead characterised as a debt and an obligation between people (Esposito, 2010). Building from, this Graeber brings these notions of communal obligation in to touch with contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Graeber demonstrates that long before the neoliberal capitalist preoccupation with individualisation, communities operated on a continually negotiated and fluctuating network of debt characterised by obligation and responsibility (Graeber, 2011), offering a more affirmative framing of the concept of debt with respect to community ties.

These learnings are then carried into educational spaces as relational spaces of debt in which knowledge and perspective sharing are approached as obligations and responsibilities to one another. In this relationship of obligation and responsibility, we are tied to one another in an on-going, continually negotiated practice of shared knowledge production in the pursuit of freedom, creating learning environments that emphasise open dialogue, respect, and compassion.

Astrid Breel, Simone Hesselberg, Natasha Kidd & Kim Townsend; Louis Patrick Leroux; Toine Minnaert
Bath Spa University, UK; Saint Paul University, Canada; Utrecht University, Netherlands

Creative practice research as a catalyst for change in policy settings

Amanda Bayley
Bath Spa University, UK

Lessons from Zimbabwe: Musical Arts, Ecology, and Cross-Cultural Learning for a Sustainable Future

This paper argues for an interdisciplinary liberal arts paradigm that bridges music, arts, ecology, and education, to confront the complex global challenges of climate change and social justice through cross-cultural exchange and curricula. Drawing on a UK-funded, multidisciplinary, multi-partner reforestation initiative in rural Zimbabwe (2023–2025), I show how creative, place-based learning continues to integrate Indigenous Knowledge with ecological practice to cultivate ecological literacy, eco-critical pedagogies, and stewardship among young people and their communities. Partners included a village primary school, a permaculture organization, community groups, and university researchers from Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the UK.

The research team reported how participatory action research traced shifted intergenerational understandings of the value of trees and re-centred unhu/ubuntu principles that decentre the individual and foreground the collective as a decolonial curricular stance (Bayley et al 2025). Findings informed new songs by teachers and recomposed mbira tunes celebrating indigenous trees and animals; these artistic forms became pedagogical tools that linked ancestral knowledge to contemporary environmental action and invited students to articulate affective relationships with the trees they planted and nurtured. Such ‘multivoiced’ learning—combining words, music, and acts of care—demonstrates how liberal arts methods can catalyse environmental communication, community agency, and landscape transformation. Universities are well placed to foster these boundary-crossing practices—co-designing modules with local and Indigenous partners, embedding field-based arts/ecology labs, and assessing collaborative artefacts—to enact UNESCO’s Education for Sustainable Development principles. The ongoing work directly advances UN SDG 4 (Quality Education) through transformative, decolonial pedagogy; SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by strengthening community participation and cultural heritage; SDG 13 (Climate Action) via youth-led mitigation/adaptation practices; and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through reforestation and biodiversity awareness. Overall, interdisciplinary liberal arts, grounded in cross-cultural reciprocity, can equip grounded in cross-cultural reciprocity, can equip learners to imagine and enact more just and sustainable futures.

Reference

Bayley, A , Clough, N, Dirwai, C, Manatsa, P and Tarr, J (2025) 'Understanding community engagement in forest restoration in rural Zimbabwe through intercultural dialogue and participatory action research.' Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 27 (2). pp. 79-104

Laura Armstrong & Brent Epperson Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada	*Wellbeing and Conflict Management: Promoting Mental Health and Transformative Practice in the Liberal Arts*

Rising levels of student distress and interpersonal conflict in post-pandemic educational settings call for integrated approaches that link mental health promotion with everyday conflict competence. This interactive session presents a practical framework that integrates the EASE conflict-coaching protocol (Empathise, Acknowledge, Solve, Explore) with Meaning Mindset Theory and Stoic philosophical principles to foster psychological safety, agency, and constructive dialogue in liberal arts contexts.

Participants will explore how teaching conflict-management and wellbeing strategies as transferable life skills can reduce escalation, enhance resilience, and support student success. Drawing on classroom applications and experiential learning models, we demonstrate how arts-based and reflective practices can be adapted for both university and middle school settings, providing developmentally appropriate tools for emotional literacy, peer support, and de-escalation.

Through perspective-taking exercises, scenario-based coaching, and guided reflection, attendees will leave with a practical template for designing wellbeing-centred conflict initiatives aligned with liberal arts values of empathy, critical thinking, and civic engagement. This session positions conflict competence not as a crisis response but as a foundational component of transformative education.

Andreia Machado Oliveira, A. Jess Alexander, Ingra Schmitt, Phumelele Dlamini, René A Smith & Thais Oliveira da Rosa University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa	*Artificial Intelligence and the Liberal Arts: Reflections from the Global South*

This article analyses some aspects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the liberal arts, from the perspective of the Global South, addressing the growing risks of excessive reliance on automated systems on critical judgment, human interaction, and cultural plurality. As AI

becomes increasingly present in the educational, artistic, and political spheres, misinformation about its capabilities and promises (particularly narratives of inevitability and technological neutrality) presents significant ethical and social challenges. The study highlights the urgent need for digital ethics and social resilience (Cockelbergh, 2023), especially in contexts historically shaped by coloniality and technological dependence. Based on Yuk Hui's critique of technological singularity (2020, 2021), this article questions the universalising logic of AI. Instead, it mobilizes Hui's concept of technodiversity to argue in favour of multiple bifurcations grounded in cultural, and epistemic differences. The research further explores how valuing local communities and collective artistic production can function as critical strategies against the invasive policies of large technology companies, critically addressing racial biases (Buolamwini, 2017), regimes of visibility, and the socio-technical contradictions embedded in AI systems. For that, emphasis is placed on emerging Afrocentric graphic storytelling practices and decolonial narratives (Delgado, 2024), that engage with AI in different cultures . In particular, the article analyses how generative AI technologies influence visual and narrative elements in AfroManga and Afro anime, revealing tensions between cultural representation and algorithmic aesthetics, while also drawing on contemporary artworks produced within the context of the Global South. These forms of cultural representations go beyond just mirroring reality, they create reality and formalize specific worldviews or ideologies (Fursich, 2010). Ultimately, the study argues that the liberal arts play a crucial role in fostering critical, pluralistic, and ecologically attuned approaches to AI. It also positions subaltern voices as alternatives to exclusion, harm, bias and ultimately to epistemic injustice.

Richard Blows
Bath Spa University, UK

Edge of Empire: the contribution of the Liberal Arts to digital heritage visualisation

My paper will explore the impact of technology on the Liberal Arts by deconstructing a world first digital heritage project to explore the relationship between the digital artefact and the disciplines required to create it. I will use this analysis as a frame for discussing how digital technology can already be impacted by Liberal Arts disciplines, and the way in which digital heritage can present new questions and provocations for the Liberal Arts.

The case study for my paper will be Hadrian’s Wall 180, the world's first digital model of the northern frontier of the Roman Empire as it may have appeared in the Year 180CE.

I will argue that the research, design and development of Hadrian’s Wall required knowledge, skills and expertise drawn from across the Liberal Arts disciplines, including history, archaeology, art and literature, geography and geology as well as an applied understanding of geology and engineering.

The resulting workflow evolved from critical engagement with primary and secondary sources, through the development of our own research tools to curate information to the creation of artwork and images to interpret the evidence and the creative decisions needed to fill in the absence of evidence and finally the impact that the actual product can have.

The output in turn has been used to illustrate concepts and pose questions across Liberal Arts disciplines including to school children, undergraduates and members of the public.

By considering Hadrian's Wall 180 as a truly interdisciplinary project, built around technology and technologists, I will illustrate how positive engagement can be designed to make the most of technology in an arts context whilst exploring how "safe uncertainty" is held, presented and communicated in a context where "truth" is an increasingly contested idea.