

## Curricula of value – in place and in service

### **Abstract**

Flowing from a curriculum review and strategic re-direction of the School of Creative Arts from 2015 to 2017, this paper details an approach to designing 'valuable' degrees in the service of future-oriented, place-based concerns. The place in focus could be equally labelled 'wicked Tasmania' for its demographic and educational attainment challenges, or 'design island' for its rich traditions and cultures of making, beginning with the Aboriginal Tasmanians. Amid a phase of unprecedented creative production in Tasmania, four themes have been deemed 'valuable' to the island state: creative communities, creative technology, creative health, and creative industries.

In our thematic and post-disciplinary conception of curricula, once discreet disciplines are wilfully subsumed and re-oriented to intersect with 'foreign' disciplines such as health, science, community services and tourism, and socially-located practices outside the university. Such boundary crossing pursued via these thematics is not an end in itself; rather it is positioned in the service of the Tasmanian communities and industries with which we partner, as well as institutional goals for graduates.

Taking perspectives from curriculum design, place and cultural value, we outline the re-design of a statewide degree targeting the educational goals of Tasmania: the Bachelor of Creative Arts (BCA). We highlight the thematic underpinnings, course design principles, and dialogue between disciplinary and contextual curriculum elements. Finally, we propose that discerning and delivering value, through the critical engagement of creativity with the specifics of place, becomes the key transferable skill of our future BCA graduates.

### **Dr Wendy Fountain**

School of Creative Arts

University of Tasmania

E: [wendy.fountain@utas.edu.au](mailto:wendy.fountain@utas.edu.au)

T: 0424 190 160

Over a 20 year period, Wendy has worked in design practice, design teaching and educational design, currently focusing on creative practice curriculum and research. Her doctoral design research between 2011-2014 centred on integrating housing and food systems via a living lab, drawing on resilience thinking, ecological design and practice theories. Wendy has held educational design roles in Australia, Sweden, New Zealand and the UK, and been based in Tasmania since 2008.

**Dr Karen Hall**

School of Creative Arts  
University of Tasmania  
E: karen.hall@utas.edu.au  
T:0409 209 808

Dr Karen Hall is Course Coordinator of the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts and Site Coordinator for the School of Creative Arts at Inveresk, and is also a lecturer in Theory. Her research explores how the past is reimagined in the present across a range of creative disciplines: from medievalism in Victorian photography and contemporary film and television to Tasmanian convict and colonial heritage in ephemeral and site-specific contemporary art.

**Professor Kit Wise**

School of Creative Arts  
University of Tasmania  
E: kit.wise@utas.edu.au  
T: 0415 843 100

Professor Kit Wise is Director and Head of the School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania. His research focuses on approaches to and outcomes from interdisciplinary education and research. He is also an art writer, curator and practising artist.

**Dr Kate Tregloan**

Monash Art, Design and Architecture  
Monash University  
E: kate.tregloan@monash.edu  
T: 0419 531 540

Dr Kate Tregloan is Associate Dean (Education) at Monash University Art Design + Architecture. Her research focuses on the intersection of qualitative and quantitative judgments influencing the production and assessment of creative work. This includes the pedagogy and exploratory activities that underpin learning, designing, and learning to design. She was the Project Lead and Chief Investigator for the Multiple Measures project.

## Introduction

In questioning how new creative arts and design curricula can create and realise value for Tasmania, we focus in this paper on a new degree launching in 2019 that is an expression of place with particular challenges and opportunities. The 'valuable' degree in focus – the new Bachelor of Creative Arts (BCA) – is one of a suite of new courses arising from an extensive review of creative practice curricula at the University of Tasmania during 2015-2017. The new and revitalised degrees (spanning art, music, design, theatre and new thematic fields) grapple with Tasmania's small scale and relative socioeconomic disadvantage, but are also alert to the unprecedented level of cultural production now taking place in the island state. In this process of curriculum (and organisational) transformation we have striven to understand and frame the 'wickedness' of our context, referencing the 'wicked problems' first coined by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973) to convey the complex dilemmas in planning and governing. In Tasmania, the seemingly intractable nature of socio-economic problems accord with Richard Buchanan's (1992) later take on the 'wicked' – to connote the indeterminate problems of design and the need for design thinking. Such wickedness then, provokes a creative response to expand the multiple forms of value already being exchanged in the Tasmanian cultural economy, informed by Su Baker's (2009) insights on creative arts futures. Within this goal of place-attuned curriculum innovation, we are also working more explicitly with ideas of knowledge boundaries and boundary crossing to derive and realise value (Blackwell, Wilson, Boulton and Knell 2010).

Value creation and realisation in this context are contingent on particular features of place including regional intimacy and cohesion (Hall 2014), strong traditions of making and 'making do', and existing relationships between a network of grassroots arts and community organisations and the University. The realisation of value therein is potentially social, cultural, environmental and economic when considered via the state-based value creation framework introduced recently in Victoria (Victorian Government 2016). Centred on Tasmania, Kim Lehman's (2017, 6) current work on cultural value offers a useful 'cultural assets framework' – comprising spaces and places, partnerships and collaborations, objects and artefacts, and activities and events – from which to derive place-based value.

The latent potential in this regard is ample; Tasmania has been a persistent underperformer nationally in educational attainment and school completions (Stratford, Field, Oliver and Ambrose 2016), for example, and its current government is motivated by the need to develop the capacity to diversify and transition the economy and attract migrants and investment (Tasmanian Government 2015). In a complementary move, the University of Tasmania introduced and mandated a new curriculum framework in 2016 titled *Degrees of Difference* (UTAS 2016), which seeks to normalise four years of higher education, integrally develop students' disciplinary depth and experiential

breadth, and ensure students' achievement of specified Graduate Statement requirements, in effect engineering new generations of 'culturally valuable' engaged citizens (Lehman 2017, 3).

By placing the new curricula, and BCA in particular, in the service of such place-based challenges, we critically question in this paper what is most valuable to Tasmania, and elucidate how the development of post-disciplinary, thematic curricula creates value and for whom. We then outline the philosophy and structure of the new degree, and propose that discerning and delivering value, through the critical engagement of creativity with the specifics of place, becomes the key transferable skill of our future BCA graduates.

### **Determining what is valuable to 'wicked Tasmania'**

Departing from our perspective within creative arts and design education, we suggest latent value exists in the nexus between the new *Degrees of Difference* curriculum framework and the array of cultural institutions and events for which Tasmania has become recognised, with the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) an undisputed game-changer. In navigating this terrain of potential value, it is important to underscore that the flow-through from such high profile cultural activity is neither uniform nor beneficial to all Tasmanians (Booth 2017). Much creative arts participation occurs at the scale of community and is voluntary; established pathways to employment are limited, and practising artists' and designers' livelihoods are typically precarious. What then is valuable about our re-visioned creative arts and design education, and to whom?

For students commencing in the new *Degrees of Difference* (UTAS 2016) framework, their process of undertaking higher education should equip them to participate more fully in civil society, in and beyond the state. Graduates will acquire broad and specialised knowledge and skills, the capacity to perform work in a chosen field/s, and be able to steward their own working life and ongoing learning as the nature of creative work continues to be transformed by digital technologies and global networks. These are aspirations common to many art and design schools in the sector, but in Tasmania the renewed curriculum model is now more overt, communicating a clearer narrative and set of value propositions for students at UTAS, with flow-on expectations for aligning teaching and research.

Designing curricula of value in response however, requires us to negotiate multiple sets of discordant and imposed values. The internal process for proposing new curricula, for example, requires parallel preparation of a business case and approval on which course proposals are contingent. In this, efficiencies are demonstrably most valued, along with evidenced student demand and labour market relevance. While not unreasonable with respect to accountability for our public funding, such unequivocal claims can be difficult to evidence in the cultural economy in which

value itself, 'work' and 'jobs' are difficult to quantify (Baker 2009). Similarly, the newly instated quality assurance mechanisms of TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency 2015) privilege textual prescription in the mapping of course and unit learning outcomes and assessment. The ensuing reductionist codification and cross-referencing of our courses obscures the often valuable 'unscripted learning' that inspires and enriches students and staff alike. In our setting, this often arises through the exchange of cultural capital between students, staff and visiting creative practitioners, and in the non-unitised experiences that are spurred by temporally bound events and festivals. In short, we know, but cannot trade on the fact that value is realised through unexpected outcomes, in place.

Viewed at the scale of the state, new 'degrees of difference' have the potential to expand the digitally literate workforce as both potential employees and employers given the greater emphasis afforded to 'enterprise skills' (Foundation for Young Australians 2015) and minimum requirements for experiential and work-integrated learning. In 'wicked Tasmania', any relevant, appealing new degree presents an opportunity to expand the capacity of students – both school leaver and mature age – who otherwise may not have pursued a higher education in line with inter-generational educational patterns (Stratford, Field, Oliver and Ambrose 2016). We are cautious, however, of designing overly instrumental new curricula, subservient to state and national industry demands. In contrast, the realisation of value for the players above will occur most through exchanges across the creative arts and design ecology in Tasmania, with intense activity around two north-south nodes currently under development: The Hedberg performance hub in Hobart, and the Northern Expansion in Launceston and Burnie (see <http://www.utas.edu.au/cipa> and <http://www.utas.edu.au/northern-transformation>, respectively). Such infrastructure, while valuable in investment terms, requires human systems and relations for value creation and realisation; the new curricula are therefore being designed in a dynamic dialogue with these new large-scale cultural assets.

### **Designing post-disciplinary, thematic curricula for value creation**

Drawing focus on the Bachelor of Creative Arts (BCA), the new degree in-progress is evolving recent work on designing post-disciplinary curricula in response to salient social motives and practices (Fountain and Wise 2016), while mediating the design constraints and opportunities posed by the new institutional curriculum model. At the BCA's conceptual core are four socially-attuned thematics which also align with the School's research themes: creative communities, creative technology, creative health and creative industries. These themes are an expression of the active knowledge and boundary crossing (Blackwell, Wilson, Boulton and Knell 2010)

we have pursued since 2015, and which we now understand as post-disciplinary for their applied, multi-partner, problem-solving frameworks in the service of Tasmanian concerns. Following, we outline each theme, its role and relative scale in the proposed four-year BCA.

The **creative communities** thematic is positioned as core knowledge in the degree, also proposed as a 'breadth unit' which is open to students university-wide and, by regulation, requires cross-disciplinary team development and online delivery to maximise access. In recognition of community partnerships and collaborations as community assets (Lehman 2017), this thematic refutes the prevalent ameliorative or deficit model of community arts. In such a model, regional communities (or other communities) are positioned as lacking and in need of projects that are valued for purely instrumental purposes. The course learning outcomes (refer Figure 2) extend students beyond learning with community, to include critical engagement in evaluating the *outcomes* of their community-engaged creative projects.

**Creative technology** is an underlying and integrated theme throughout the entire BCA, rather than a separate stream, given the increasingly embedded nature of digital technologies in creative practice. Our formative curriculum thinking suggests two interrelated strands of pedagogical potential: 'technologies of making' and 'technologies of communicating'. Together, we aim for students to develop capacities beyond digital literacy as an end goal. The former – technologies of making – takes up the STEAM agenda where integration of the arts with science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) is understood to support students' development of creative, experimental, and critical capacities, and for students to *direct* exploration with technologies toward solving humanity's pressing social and environmental problems (Taylor 2016). Realising the value of STEAM approaches across the BCA curriculum not only requires a commitment to boundary crossing and relationship-building across disciplines, but also in realising the facilities and equipment that can support digital technologies of making (such as hackerspaces emerging out of the major northern and southern infrastructure projects noted above).

Students' creative agency with technology will develop in tandem with the second strand – technologies of communication – by effectively learning 'out loud' which will involve them negotiating their public/private digital footprints across institutionally supported and unsupported online systems and spaces. This includes recognising the value of the personal digital domain in creating and showcasing work for portfolio careers, and students understanding their work as valuable in terms of intellectual property and digital rights. In extending learning spaces online, we are also grappling with competing values in terms of technologies of teaching and the institutional extraction of 'value' from staff as content producers, as distinct from facilitators of valuable, ephemeral interactions. The resultant content is, by default, valued institutionally through

containment (gatekeeping within online learning platforms), rather than forming exchangeable value through use (open access) in the wider cultural economy (Baker 2009).

The **creative health** curriculum thematic takes shape in the BCA at the scale of a major (eight units) and minor (four units). The theme connects staff research interests with the Tasmanian educational attainment agenda by responding to non-traditional students, many of whom have personal experience as home- or industry-based caregivers. Relationships across family and community networks are foregrounded in the major, with units in the advanced/third year level of the major to include observations/placement in care and service settings. The theme's social value is clearly evident, but for students, we can help realise further value through integrally deepening their skills in one or more creative practice disciplines, which will in turn drive their practice in creative health work.

The final thematic, **creative industries**, is expressed in the BCA context as Event Making and Arts Enterprise minors with an emphasis on experiential learning, playing off the state's active festival and event calendar and allied industries. Space must therefore be achieved in the new degree structure to absorb and value different rhythms of learning and locate students *inside* these events as work and practice environments. A key feature of the Event Making minor is immersion; folding students' experience between roles as event/festival participant and/or producer and curator.

### **The new Bachelor of Creative Arts, by design**

Following framing of the 'wickedly Tasmanian' problems the new BCA seeks to impact, we iteratively articulated the following design principles which also reflect the course philosophy:

- This degree provides transformative, holistic experiences which meet students where they are on entry, and scaffold them through the early construction of professional identities (Bridgstock 2013) with a commitment to social responsibility, ethical conduct and sustainability.
- Students are empowered to not only navigate an industry characterised by portfolio careers, collaboration, complexity and local/global interfaces but to generate value exchange and forge leadership roles.
- Discipline expertise is developed through a major sequence (required) that is placed in dialogue with thematic major and/or minor sequences that critically engage with the social and industry contexts of creative practice.
- Delivery is state-wide and primarily on-campus with integral blended learning and intensive modes to maximise students' access to facilities, expertise and community-based projects. Some components of the degree, such as breadth units, will be fully online.

- The structural elements of the degree form coherent blocks that set up potential hop-over points between degrees, fold into smaller qualifications, and/or evolve into something larger. The sequencing of these blocks sets up trajectories of learning progression and application of skills, and enables increasing exercise of agency by students.
- The structural elements of the course support conceptual and practical integration from the outset via Immersive Project and Creative Communities (refer Figure 1) i.e. thinking and learning through making, and work-integrated learning informed by the contexts of communities and industries.

The resultant structural elements of the BCA curriculum are summarised in Figure 1:

<b>Core degree knowledge</b>	<b>Disciplinary majors (min. one required)</b>	<b>Contextual minor (min. one required)</b>
Immersive Project (core unit) Creative Communities (breadth unit)	Theatre Performance Theatre Production & Design Visual Art Dance Creative Health Music Creative Writing	Event Making Arts Enterprise Creative Health Applied Design

Figure 1: BCA curriculum structural elements

Corresponding to the values embedded in these curriculum design principles are the outcomes we have articulated for BCA graduates, informed by consultation with industry and community stakeholders locally and nationally. Consistent with a four-year Honours degree, the following draft course learning outcomes in Figure 2 are pegged at Level 8 of the Australian Qualifications Framework (Department of Education and Training 2013):

<b>Curriculum philosophy knowledge and skill domain</b>	<b>Draft course learning outcomes</b>
Diverse and adaptable skill set (technical, visual, performative)	1. Demonstrate technical and conceptual knowledge and skills, within and across disciplines, through creative making/performing.
Agility and creativity	2. Realise multidisciplinary creative projects for diverse contexts and identify their impacts.
Collaboration and communication	3. Carry out collaborations that result in public outcomes through the development of communication, process and interpersonal skills.
Speculative and critical thinking Independent inquiry	4. Use independent and ethical inquiry as part of research to generate and critique new creative knowledge and/or practices, informed by communities and industries.
Community and industry engagement	5. Formulate, apply and evaluate strategies for reflective learning, creating ongoing opportunities within portfolio fields/professional practice and enabling well-being of self, community and place.

Figure 2: BCA draft course learning outcomes

### **Concluding thoughts: Future BCA graduates as agents of cultural value?**

This paper has outlined the development of a new curriculum model and learning outcomes for a place-based approach to pedagogy, focusing on the Bachelor of Creative Arts. While ‘value’ has been asserted in a number of ways, defining and measuring value remains complex. Indeed, the paper suggests that graduates of the degree will articulate and manifest new value(s) in response to the challenges of the future: while the four thematics identified – creative communities, creative technology, creative health and creative industries – suggest disciplinary boundary crossing dynamics and fluidity. We expect these will in turn be re-assessed and reconfigured, in response to the needs and possibilities apparent in Tasmania, as they emerge.

One key ‘measure’ of value is the contribution to cultural value that future BCA graduates are envisioned to make, as per Lehman’s (2017) cultural assets framework. In this conception, graduates will be equipped to create and derive ongoing value from cultural assets that they co-create, and possess the meta-cognitive skills to understand and manage their own agency in those

relations. Through learning how to construct value between disciplines and in partnership with the community, BCA graduates will be able to bring those learnings to other discipline groupings and real-world contexts. Indeed, discerning and delivering value, through the critical engagement of creativity with the specifics of place, becomes the key transferable skill of the Creative Arts graduate. Defining this value in terms of economic, social, cultural, environmental, wellbeing or other measures has been clarified as a capstone requirement for the graduate, and enabling such, marks the transition from studentship to agency. Noting that the degree represents an Honours qualification, this active construction of cultural value also opens new opportunities for defining the research component of community and industry engagement.

The rich potential of this island state allows value to be constructed through the BCA at multiple levels: for the individual student, for the creative arts industry, for local communities and for the prosperity of the state. However, the trajectory of many of these graduates is likely to be interstate. By learning with and from the many unique cultural assets of Tasmania, it is hoped these graduates will be able to achieve wider impact. Drawing deeply on the lessons learnt, grounded in specific experiences and exchanges, the flexibility and ingenuity developed through the BCA will stand them in good stead as creative agents operating in globalised flows of value.

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