Internships can provide essential exposure and training for undergraduates, but students interested in pursuing a career in arts and culture face limited opportunities and multiple barriers. Culture Corps, a new UM arts internship program proposed to address these issues, is designed to

- emphasize accessibility for entry into arts internships and future careers in arts and culture, and
- engage and serve all partners: diverse student populations, local artists and arts organizations, and the University.

What would make it possible for a broader group of undergraduates to engage in an arts internship, and then move toward a career in arts and culture?

The program recommendations that follow are based on a review of existing literature as well as findings from original research, conducted by the Culture Corps research team during May–July 2021, and including:

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<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS with</th>
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<tr>
<td>15 colleagues across UM who shared best practices from their programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 arts administrators in SE Michigan who shared their experiences hosting interns</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 artists who explored how the program might partner with small, artist-run organizations</td>
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<td>5 recent UM alumni working in the arts who spoke about their career pathways</td>
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<td>2 community college transfer students who described barriers to studying the arts</td>
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<th>SURVEY RESPONSES from</th>
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<td>48 arts administrators from a range of arts and culture orgs in SE Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>381 students 55 who had completed arts internships; 326 who might be interested</td>
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We are grateful for the expertise and ideas that all these parties brought to our inquiry and hope that this spirit of co-creation will be core to the creation and ongoing life of Culture Corps.
Core Values

Four ideas that emerged from our research form the core of the Culture Corps model.

1. **Interconnection** [who]

   Culture Corps is based on an idea of **shared responsibility and mutual benefits**. The program should be designed to focus equally on the needs of three partners: the University, arts and culture organizations located in SE Michigan, and BA/BS students, particularly students from historically excluded groups, such as racial/ethnic minority students and first-gen, transfer, and returning students.

2. **Co-creation** [how]

   Culture Corps should be built through **collaboration**. An ongoing approach that welcomes the distinct perspectives, knowledge and strengths of all three partners will be invaluable to Culture Corps’ success and evolution. The University plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication, building trust and meaningful relationships among students, arts organizations and artists.
The Culture Corps program is envisioned as an ongoing yearly cycle. How all partners enter and exit the internship is as important as the internship itself.

The program guarantees a placement for each student and creates structures to guide them into and out from the internship. Attending to the internship as one moment in a longer sequence provides students time to prepare expectations in advance and reflect afterwards. This model prompts students to fully consider and work to understand the significance of their internship and how it can move them toward an arts and culture career.

The student experience unfolds across the year: students first encounter the program, enter a cohort, and prepare together in an experiential learning course, and then they engage in their internships. They return to UM in the fall to reflect on their internship experience, share their work with the next potential cohort, and imagine how their internship might lead to a career path in arts and culture.

Culture Corps must intentionally strive to be a program and a set of partnerships in which people from historically excluded groups can see themselves. If students derive a sense of belonging from their internships—a sense that the arts and culture sector should and does include people like them—they are more likely to stay in the field.

Relationship-building is central to forging a program where students from racial/ethnic minorities and community college/transfer/first-gen students feel at home. Culture Corps will create structures that help students navigate logistical and cultural barriers, connecting them with mentors who offer concrete examples of the roles and career possibilities within the arts and culture sector and, whenever possible, share and/or understand the students’ identity.
“It’s a dream of mine to do an arts internship one day, so truthfully, I’m excited for ANY kind!”

Students are interested in the arts. The eager response to our survey suggests that UM students are looking for arts opportunities. 80% of our sample report an arts hobby and 61% had taken 1–2 arts courses at UM. But many, especially BA/BS students, and students from historically excluded groups face barriers to following through on their interest. One noted, “Art has always been my passion, but... I was discouraged [by] family.”

Financial support is necessary to make arts internships viable for all students. Both previous and aspiring arts interns reported “not finding a paid internship” as their top obstacle or concern. One noted, I’m “concerned mostly with pay, being from a working class background and a first-gen student.” Another said, “I had to turn down an arts internship I was really excited about this summer because it was unpaid.”

Students would welcome training, and preparation. 90% of interested students said it would be helpful to enroll in a course to develop workplace skills. One noted, “I wish UM had more opportunities.” Arts supervisors add that realistic expectations about the kinds of work arts workers do would be beneficial for all.

Students value a peer cohort and seek social and professional ties. 68% of previous arts interns said it would have been helpful to debrief with peers about their internship experiences, and 75% of interested students agreed that a peer cohort would be helpful. 82% of interested students said it would be helpful to develop friendships with other interns. Almost all previous and aspiring interns (about 90%) felt it would be helpful to enroll in a course that provided support for finding an internship position.
**Arts orgs value student interns.**

While organizations that host interns clearly value their help, respondents also spoke of the “fresh energy and enthusiasm... and ideas” that students bring to their institutions. One said, “I get to learn things as a result of their curious nature.” Another noted, “we benefit from their participation, new perspectives and skill sets. We hope they gain the same from us.”

**Financial resources are a concern.**

Being able to afford an intern was the top capacity concern for respondents. 43% said they currently provide their interns with financial compensation. 91% agree that they would be better able to host student interns with UM’s financial and logistical support.

**Arts orgs identify interpersonal skills as key for student interns.**

When asked which competencies are most important for student interns, respondents identified: interpersonal skills (collaboration, teamwork); knowledge of workplace norms (meeting deadlines, asking for help); and curiosity and willingness to learn. One noted “even very good students” often don’t know how to be in a work environment. Another spoke of the importance of being “able to interact thoughtfully with a range of people both racially and generationally.”

**Arts orgs recognize the value of peer cohort for student interns — and hosts.** Supervisors spoke of the importance of peer engagement. “I really wish I [could host] a small group of interns so that they had peer support during this experience. That was a great positive of my own student internships—peer support and friendships.” Others spoke of developing a “community of practice” amongst the Culture Corps host cohort.

**Arts orgs are interested in an ongoing partnership with UM, and are eager to co-create educational experiences for students.** Although there was concern about navigating University bureaucracy, 91% of our sample is interested in an ongoing partnership with a UM arts internship program. Respondents in small, artist-run orgs and larger entities alike were engaged and excited about the mutual benefits of expanding their capacity while providing valuable learning experiences for students. Many expressed interest in working with the program director and other hosts to prepare students and engage in the matching process.

“We’re very interested in working with educational institutions to ensure there are consistent avenues for intern support during the partnership.”

**Survey sample:**

- 48 respondents
- 21 arts administrators and artists spoke with us in-depth and 48 arts intern supervisors took our survey
Start-Up Guide

The University plays an essential role in the success of Culture Corps by ensuring adequate compensation and resources for students and host orgs, and fostering the relationships at the core of the program.

We have three key recommendations for implementation:

1. **Build on existing infrastructure.**
   Culture Corps should begin with key partners at UM and in the region whose expertise and existing relationships can facilitate a pilot and help to develop a sustainable program. Given the Culture Corps’ focus on BA and BS degree students, we recommend that it be based in LSA and work closely with programs serving first-gen, community college transfer students, and other historically excluded student groups. Our research identified promising UM partnerships that would allow the program to build on existing networks and knowledge of student needs, and interests. Similarly, our research uncovered strong interest among arts and culture organizations in SE Michigan, many led by people from historically excluded populations, to engage in a meaningful way with an internship program.

2. **Start small, go deep.**
   Culture Corps has tremendous potential: to have a lasting impact on student learning and career choices, to increase capacity in arts and culture orgs in SE Michigan, and to serve as a model for collaborative arts internship programs in similar geographic contexts. The success of the program will rely on thoughtfully developed pedagogical structures, logistical supports and trusting relationships that can support the matching process and high-touch mentorship that ultimately creates meaningful change. Although it may not be feasible in 2021, we recommend a full-time staff member be hired to lead Culture Corps. The program director is the administrative head, a mentor to students and instructor of the required course, a liaison to host organizations, and a mediator of the student–host org relationship. Given post-pandemic conditions, we suggest focusing on a small, strategic starting point, and expanding into a full pilot once a program director and host relationships are in place.

3. **Find partners.**
   Growth for this program should be predicated on finding partners — to further enmesh the program in existing structures and ecologies, and to make the program sustainable for a longer period of time. The priorities identified in this report suggest Culture Corps aligns with many regional and national funders current foci: supporting capacity building in the arts, supporting Detroit, and re-imagining structures to create a more inclusive and welcoming arts and culture sector.

For access to the full report contact: artsinitiative@umich.edu
**Culture Corps Yearly Cycle**

**Fall**
- **exposure + recruitment**
  - Introduce Culture Corps, inform and engage students during campus welcome events, and arts programming
  - Reach out to UM partner programs and relevant student orgs to connect, share materials, and plan student exposure events
  - Promote to students through academic advisor channels, recruit via conversations and interest form (non-application) for winter class
  - Recruit host organizations, plan supervisor course visits

**Winter**
- **required prep course**
  - Required course content to include: cohort-building, practice working as a team; reflection exercises to identify and articulate skills and interests; overview of possibilities for work in the arts sector.
  - Exposure – via host orgs course visits and fieldwork assignments – to concrete examples of what arts and culture work looks like on a daily basis, including: most commonly used workplace skills, norms, expectations, practical understanding of how orgs work.
  - Program director facilitates occasional cohort meetings of host orgs to share ideas for supervision and mentorship plans, discuss expectations and gain a sense of belonging to the larger project

**Summer**
- **internship**
  - Flexible schedule (spring/summer) to accommodate students and hosts
  - Two concurrent projects: one supervised and timed by orgs needs, and one longer term, independent project aligned with student interests
  - Program director check-in to troubleshoot any issues
  - Cohort communication (student and orgs) to share experiences

**Fall**
- **reflection + connection**
  - Cohort and individual reflection on internships, arts-based interests (revisit and compare with baseline reflection from Winter term)
  - Assignments that help students articulate new skills and experience, and prepare assets for next steps in pursuing a career in the arts
  - Develop presentation to showcase internship takeaways and plans
  - Share final presentation and celebrate experience with cohort, hosts, UM partners – and future Culture Corps students
  - Host cohort debrief / program suggestions