Art at Work
Supporting RealArts Internships

Successful careers in the arts and culture require a combination of solid skills, intellectual context, and practical know-how. Penn Arts & Sciences courses provide a strong foundation in a range of disciplines related to the arts, and our emphasis on developing skills in critical thinking, analysis, and communication prepares students for success in virtually any field. But for many students, the biggest hurdle is finding opportunities to apply their skills outside the classroom, and this is especially true for students who want to explore careers in the arts. RealArts@Penn addresses this need by providing students with meaningful experiences and important connections in such industries as film and entertainment, journalism, publishing, and museum curatorship.

Kevin McMullin, C’09, (left) knew he wanted to be a filmmaker but didn’t know how to make that happen. He interned at Brooklyn Films, helmed by Jon Avnet, C’71. “I was alone in my professional pursuit of the arts with only a vague sense of how to form a career path,” he says. “My internship at Brooklyn Films reaffirmed my desire to work in entertainment and provided the opportunity to engage with professionals in the industry. I left that summer knowing that it was possible.” McMullin is the co-founder of Boy & Star, a production company, and their feature film, Low Tide, was released theatrically by A24 in 2019.
The challenge of arts and cultural internships are twofold: fewer internships exist than in other fields, and internships that do exist tend to be unpaid, and thus inaccessible to those talented, motivated students who rely on income from summer jobs. RealArts@Penn addresses these challenges by developing relationships with organizations that can offer creative, stimulating opportunities and by providing stipends for qualified students. In addition to placing students in established internships, the program offers funding, awarded on a competitive basis, to undergraduates who independently secure an internship in a creative field. This approach increases opportunity and access, providing invaluable professional experiences and training students to become leaders in creative fields after graduation.

RealArts also integrates art-world practice into the intellectual life of the university through varied forms of alumni mentorship. A speaker series for fourth-year students introduces them to alumni in the journalism and entertainment fields, while regular lunches connect undergraduates with alumni who are creative professionals and fellow students who have held RealArts internships in the past. RealArts mixers in cities across the country are opportunities for alumni and students interested in arts and culture fields to connect and share experiences.

Supporting RealArts means that future generations of students interested in the arts and cultural fields can gain professional experiences and establish the networks that will position them for successful careers in their life after Penn.

Clare Menzel, C'15, went outside of her comfort zone for her RealArts internship—all the way to Kalispell, Montana. There, she interned at the Flathead Beacon, a local paper, and found she thrives in a fast-paced, deadline-driven environment. The New Hampshire native also found a home in Montana, where she now writes for Flathead Living, a lifestyle magazine. “When I first moved here, I didn’t know anybody, but now I have a whole lovely community,” she says. “I built a career and a life here that started with the internship.”
Endow and name the RealArts program with a gift of $5 million
A naming gift to endow the program would provide a perpetual funding stream for RealArts, ensuring that generation of Penn students will have opportunities to pursue arts and cultural internships, regardless of income level.

Endow and name a RealArts internship with a gift of $125,000
Endowing an internship would provide summer funding for one student in perpetuity.

Endow and name the RealArts alumni mentorship program with a gift of $500,000
A gift to the alumni mentorship program ensures that students and alumni interested in arts and culture fields can learn from one another and grow their networks. A term gift $100,000 provides funds for five years.

Justin Lee, C'18, studied political science and economics, but he wanted to work in the film industry. His internship at Genre Films led to a full-time position, one where his social science background is an asset. “So many of the issues discussed at work involve big financial decisions, and in those moments I really appreciate my economics major,” he says. “RealArts made the start of my career so much less daunting, and I feel incredibly lucky when I reflect on how well this opportunity worked out for me.” He is now a story editor at Lord Miller.

Now, Joe Pinsker, C’13, (right) is a staff writer at The Atlantic. As an undergraduate, he got his start as a RealArts intern at Rolling Stone, where he transcribed interviews, researched features, and factchecked stories, in addition to covering music festivals for the web. “Experiencing what it’s like to work at a national publication was a huge deal for me personally, and helped me to land a job as an editor at The Atlantic,” he says. “RealArts is a great program because it puts Penn’s fabulous resources behind showing that there are more creative ways to make a living.”
There are many ways to support RealArts@Penn. Gifts may fund internships, internship prizes, or mentorship programs. To learn more about supporting RealArts at all levels, please contact Deb Rhebergen, Vice Dean for Advancement, at 215-898-9942 or drheberg@sas.upenn.edu.

“There’s a trend toward unpaid internships in the arts and culture fields. This model presents a hardship for many of our talented students. RealArts is an alternative—we match the right student with the right organization and then, through the generosity of Penn donors, make it a rewarding experience.”

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Kelly Family Professor of English, Director of the Kelly Writers House