

## News Release

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*Contact:* Annetta Crecelius

Director of Marketing & Communications

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

*Phone:* 303-871-2466 *Email:* [annetta.crecelius@du.edu](mailto:annetta.crecelius@du.edu)



UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

COLLEGE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES  
& SOCIAL SCIENCES

## Mellon Foundation invests in faculty-led startup initiatives at the University of Denver

DENVER—The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded \$250,000 to the University of Denver’s **Center for Innovation in the Liberal and Creative Arts (CILCA)** to develop five major startup initiatives over the next 12 months. An academic venture capital firm focused on faculty-driven projects, CILCA is a revolutionary approach to research, creative work, teaching, and community involvement.

“With this support from the Mellon Foundation, the Center for Innovation in the Liberal and Creative Arts in DU’s College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences will explore innovative programming that improves the student experience and serves the community,” said Chancellor Rebecca Chopp. “The University of Denver is grateful to the Mellon Foundation. Our friendship and mutual commitment to the public good will help transform 21st century education and improve lives.”

“We live at a time when many Americans question higher education’s commitment to serve the public good rather than individual interests,” noted Eugene Tobin, senior program officer at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. “DU’s relationships with Denver’s civic, cultural, educational, and government agencies demonstrate how ‘knowledge bridges’ connect a leading urban university to the people and communities it aspires to serve.”

The five major CILCA initiatives to be funded by the Mellon Foundation award are:

- **Clinic for Open-Source Arts**  
The Clinic for Open-Source Arts bridges arts and computing by supporting the development of open-source tools for artists to create works with computer code. Diversity will be central to this project, both in the recruitment of developers and in the creation of a variety of tools being used.
- **Casa de Paz Learning and Immigration Issues Initiative**  
This initiative encapsulates CILCA’s focus on problem-based learning and collaboration across programs. It begins with a series of five linked service-learning courses in which students work with a local nonprofit, Casa de Paz, supporting immigrants recently released from the Aurora Detention Center. The initiative has expanded to include scholarship and community outreach opportunities, a symposium on immigration issues, scholarship, creative work and policy, and a digital data and storytelling “migrhack” to illuminate and offer solutions to immigration issues.
- **Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue Initiative**  
Through the Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue Initiative, faculty will work to develop

multi-quarter, immersive and experiential opportunities for students from all disciplines to think critically about the role of religion in the modern world. The project creates the opportunity to combine curricular and co-curricular programming, while providing students with critical cultural competencies for thriving in today's workforce. They will have opportunities to build expertise in areas that are of heightened importance to employers.

- **DU Prison Arts Initiative**

The DU Prison Arts Initiative (DU PAI) provides high-quality therapeutic arts programs to incarcerated people in Colorado, with the goal of empowering participants to improve the quality of their lives and prepare them to make positive changes in their communities upon release. DU PAI will expand therapeutic arts programming in Colorado Department of Corrections facilities with a series of workshops provided by DU faculty across a wide range of artistic disciplines. DU PAI will also develop the infrastructure for an innovative program for student involvement through an “inside-out” learning model. Students will be given the opportunity to gain valuable experiences in correctional facility-based classes with a vulnerable population.

- **PRAXIS Transdisciplinary Keystone Experience Development**

Inspired by a mission to foster “critical thinkers who make,” the PRAXIS initiative will focus on preparing students to incorporate new and emerging technologies and practices across disciplinary fields through the study of critical theory. The program may culminate with research papers, literary/digital art, or entrepreneurial projects incorporating digital technologies and the emerging media landscape. These projects expand ideas about what types of actions make one a “critical thinker” and how these actions relate to questions of creating. The students will make the works they create public and accessible to a broad audience beyond DU.

“CILCA’s goal is to fundamentally alter the way we view knowledge, student learning, faculty scholarship, and the role of the university in today’s society,” said Derigan Silver, CILCA director and associate professor in media, film and journalism studies. “With the support of the Mellon Foundation, we now have the resources to help our faculty not only dream big, but make those dreams a reality.”

“Funding provided by the Mellon Foundation is key to the success of CILCA’s academic venture capital model,” said Daniel McIntosh, dean of the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. “By supporting a center that accelerates faculty-initiated innovation in teaching and scholarship, Mellon’s investment will demonstrate how to unleash and support exciting improvements in student learning and knowledge creation.”

While DU has long served the west as a magnet for research, education and community engagement, this role has only increased with the growing national and international interest in Colorado as a prime location for new opportunities and innovation. In alignment with the University’s bold vision for higher education through the strategic plan, [DU IMPACT 2025](#), the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences launched its [Keystone Strategic Plan](#) to re-imagine liberal and creative arts education and further its commitment to transformative work across the campus, into the community and beyond.