

**RENAISSANCE CENTER**

**FOR KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION, INTERDISCIPLINARY THINKING,**

**AND ADVANCED APPLICATIONS OF IMAGINATION**

***A Project of Creative Leaps International***

***made possible by a generous grant from The Carnegie Corporation of New York***

**REPORT ON THE PILOT YEAR**

**CASE HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY**

Written by

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President, Founder and CEO

Creative Leaps International

The Renaissance Center for Knowledge Integration,

Interdisciplinary Thinking and Advanced Applications of Imagination

With a Foreword by

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***Imagination is thinking of things as if they could be otherwise. It’s a defiance of the taken-for-granted, of the fixed. A kind of deliberate effort to break through what you assume to be true. To think of alternative possibilities. And to believe that something more is possible****.*

***Maxine Greene, American philosopher, scholar, educator and social activist***

***I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.***

***Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist, amateur violinist and pianist***



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**Foreword**

**The Renaissance Center project came to my attention** at the University at Albany, SUNY, after John Cimino and his colleagues from Creative Leaps International had run an event here to help the university with the development of a new strategic plan. That event was so successful I asked John, in my role as Interim President, if he could help us with another critical mission, i.e., to enhance the quality of our teaching. He told me of a project he had developed for Oklahoma City University focused on upgrading faculty performance and creativity and funded over a three-year period by a prominent Texas foundation. As we became better acquainted, he shared his idea of a Renaissance Center developed over more than a dozen years and built around four principles: Imagination and Synergy, Creativity and Connectivity. As a Research level-1 university, I felt we needed to put more energy into our teaching – we needed a renaissance. The Renaissance Center concept made sense to me and I elected to fund a pilot program aimed at our teaching faculty. Soon afterward, John secured a larger grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to fund the Renaissance Center’s entire mission here at UAlbany through a full 18-month pilot. During this period, I returned to my Provost position when a new President was hired and was able to work with John more actively.

Under John’s leadership, the Renaissance Center project aimed at our teaching faculty worked closely with our existing teaching center to recruit instructors of all types from departments across the wide range of campus disciplines. The program John developed established Creativity Fellows in Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership and brought the Fellows into an exciting dialogue with one another to re-imagine their courses around the above four principles. The result was unusual cross-disciplinary excitement that led to tremendous success first in their weekly deep dives into creativity and then in course re-design and deployment.

This Renaissance Center program inspired our Faculty Fellows to build exciting, caring, and creative courses that are running now much to the student’s and instructor’s delight. I was very pleased with the outcome and thought the university was on its way to achieving a better balance between teaching and research just as I happily stepped back to the faculty.

**-Jim Stellar at the time Provost and Interim President.**

**Introduction**

**THE RENAISSANCE CENTER** completed a successful 18-month pilot year at the University at Albany with generous funding from two sources: an initial infusion of funds from the University President’s Office, Dr. James R. Stellar, interim president, followed by a larger President’s Discretionary Grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Dr. Vartan Gregorian, president. This report reflects on that 18-month experience and the programs and developmental process comprising that initial year. Importantly, it highlights the decision points materializing along the way for both institutions, the Renaissance Center as well as its host, the University at Albany, and how those decisions guided and governed both programming priorities and the essential partnership between them. As groundwork and backstory for this narrative, we begin with a description of the Renaissance Center itself, the context and raison d’etre surrounding the creation of the Renaissance Center concept, the events precipitating its arrival at the University at Albany, its current status and vision for the future. The REPORT follows thereafter.

GROUNDWORK AND BACKSTORY

**What is the Renaissance Center?**

**The Renaissance Center is a revolutionary collaborative space and ideation laboratory** designed to bridge multiple sectors, disciplines and cultures and to serve as a forum for complex problem-solving relating to national and international societal challenges. It seeks to cultivate and challenge the common interests of educators, leaders from business and government, artists, scientists and entrepreneurs, and to serve as a springboard to collaboration, research and social change. Not least, it is a crucible for the formation of inspired leaders and engaged citizens, and an interdisciplinary hub for innovation, whole-systems thinking, whole-enterprise or whole-campus discourse, renewal and transformation. The Renaissance Center is an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit institution incorporated in the State of New York in 2018.

**Raison d’etre for the Renaissance Center**

**“Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) and “Global Challenges”** such as climate change, the resilience of our institutions as well as our leaders and our youth, threat of pandemics, nuclear weapons proliferation and the growing potential of nuclear war, marginalized educational opportunities, environmental degradation, threats to the global food supply, failing governments and failing socio-political systems, terrorism, social inequities and more, are front and center for our generation to address and resolve.The need for thoughtful, competent, mature, empathetic and ethical leadership is unparalleled in human history.

**We need innovative global leaders and global citizens** who have the knowledge, skills, insights and wisdom to pursue solutions with intensity, commitment and a driving sense of urgency – and the enabling organizations to support them: educational institutions, governments, businesses, and social enterprises. The raison d’etre of the Renaissance Center is nothing less than the development of the individuals, the organizations and institutions that will succeed in finding and implementing solutions to the Global Challenges and SDGs.

**Colleges and universities** **face special challenges** as they endeavor to emerge from a Covid-ravaged world and adapt to the rapidly changing learning landscape. While they need to respond nimbly to the narrowly focused pressures of a competencies-driven job market, more importantly they need to embrace a whole-systems perspective that will enable them to adequately frame and resolve the Global Challenges before us.  Helping colleges and universities excel in developing future leaders who apply imagination, synergy, creativity and connectivity to addressing global challenges is a strategic priority of the Renaissance Center.

**Origins of the Renaissance Center Concept**

**More than a dozen years in the making**, the Renaissance Center concept was first conceived by artist, scientist, educator and interdisciplinary explorer, John Cimino, in close consultation with his advisors, board members, senior faculty and co-founders of Creative Leaps International. The concept springs directly from the company’s work over three decades in business, education, the arts, sciences, leadership and creativity. The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary orientation of the Renaissance Center stems from Cimino’s early professional background and personal history as a young scientist, turned experimental educator, opera singer, composer, and lifelong explorer of interdisciplinary connections and perspectives. He credits his decades immersion in the works of Buckminster Fuller, Gregory Bateson, Loren Eiseley, Jacob Bronowski and William Blake as perhaps his most enduring and mind-shaping influences in combination with the hands-on opportunities he developed to actually do the work in countless and diverse experiential settings.

**Special acknowledgement** is also due his celebrated mentor of many years, **Dr. Vartan Gregorian**, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, for his invaluable guidance in refining, shaping and advancing the Renaissance Center vision in its present form.

**Guiding Principles and Signature Methodology**

***The first principle of Renaissance is Imagination****, and the second is Synergy: a generative principle matched with an integrative one.  So too, Creativity and Connectivity: a generative principle matched with an integrative one. That’s the key – applied across the disciplines and branches of knowledge: the arts, sciences, humanities and technology -- and no less in business, government, research, the social sector and the economy: a generative principle matched with an integrative one.*

**Every program and project of the Renaissance Center** is driven by the application of these two dynamic principles, one aimed at sparking and generating new ideas, the other at catalyzing connectivity across differences – disciplinary, cultural or individual. One deftly activates imagination, ignites and empowers new thinking. The other binds us together, cultivates relationships and seeds collaboration.

**The creative and performing arts** are positioned with signature uniqueness as sparks and catalysts within the Renaissance Center to ignite imagination, deepen reflective practices and activate new lenses for problem solving, new problem identification, learning and research. This signature methodology springs directly from the core practices of the Renaissance Center’s parent nonprofit, Creative Leaps International, whose work over three decades on six continents first inspired the Renaissance Center’s creation.



**Leadership**

**Purpose**

**Solutions**

**Selection of UAlbany as the Renaissance Center’s Founding Site – A Curious Story**

**In the fall of 2016**, after nearly a decade of lively discussions, on-going advice and encouragements, Dr. Vartan Gregorian telephoned John Cimino with his recommendation that the time had come for him to start his Renaissance Center. The world had particular need of a new type of forum, a transdisciplinary forum for integrating and unifying our highly specialized and fragmented knowledge in order to more adequately frame and resolve the great issues and challenges of our time. Further, our universities were in urgent need of reimagining and reinvention, and our rising generation of young people was in need of critically discerning thinking skills to help them find their way as responsible, engaged citizens in an era where science and truth were increasingly imperiled.

***Democracy******calls for a thoughtful, engaged citizenry***, enlightened, responsible and committed to the inclusive participation of all persons privileged with the title “citizen”. This is a challenge to be met by every generation, but it is the duty of our educational institutions to sow the seeds of desire, aspiration and competence for this most crucial of roles in a democracy. The Renaissance Center will be committed to participating in the formation of the rising generation of citizens, not by telling them what to think or what to believe, but by engaging their minds and hearts in a quest for deep truths and a deeper, more compassionate understanding of themselves and others. In a world where non-truths, alternative facts and fake news are all too pervasive, a grounded, more perceptive and critical approach to seeing and believing, knowing and understanding could not be more important. *(from the founding document of the Renaissance Center)*

**Dr. Gregorian offered to help identify the best place to start the Renaissance Center** and to assist with initial funding. Then, by way of an update, he asked John what sort of project he and his Creative Leaps colleagues were doing at that moment. John explained they were engaged in a project with the University at Albany helping with a strategic planning initiative for the university and that their part in the process was responsible for getting 350 generally unhappy faculty to participate in an idea generation process. John said he was confident his approach to the situation would be successful and that he had made a new friend in the provost, Jim Stellar, who was leading the project and had recently assumed the role of interim president. “Jim Stellar?”, Vartan declared. “I knew Jim when he was a boy and his father was Provost at UPenn. Well, you tell Jim Stellar that Vartan says we’re going to start the Renaissance Center right there at the University at Albany and that we will do it together.” And that was that.

**Soon thereafter,** John Cimino and Jim Stellar met with Vartan Gregorian in his offices at Carnegie and talked through all the details, including the very important caveat that the relationship of the Renaissance Center to the University be characterized by the word “at” rather than “of” so as to maintain independence of the two entities. Even though he knew the two of us would work well together, university governance and bureaucracy was famously complicated and it was important that Renaissance Center stay free and clear of it. What’s more, even as the Renaissance Center would be launched at the University at Albany and be very successful there, we needed to think of this whole endeavor as a “demonstration project for the nation” and “how wonderful it will be when this important innovation was recognized as having emerged from a public university” rather than one of the rich privates. “That would be really something!” Finally, just as we were leaving, passing him in the doorway, he reached to both of us from behind putting his arms on our shoulders and said, “This will not be easy, my boys. You must take good care of one another.”

**Creative Leaps International and the Strategic Planning Project at UAlbany (A key event preceding the arrival of the Renaissance Center)**

**Creative Leaps International president, John Cimino, and UAlbany provost, Jim Stellar,** had met some several months prior to their first discussions of the Renaissance Center compliments of strategic planning consultant Rob Brodnick who had been hired by Jim Stellar to lead the design and facilitation of the university’s new strategic planning initiative. The situation at UAlbany was tricky and unsettled. They had just lost their previous president in the middle of an earlier strategic planning effort and relationships among faculty and with senior administration were again fraught with distrust and bad feelings over another round of State-mandated budgetary and departmental cutbacks.

**Rob Brodnick and John Cimino had collaborated multiple times in the past**, most recently at the big SCUP Conference (Society for College and University Planning) in Chicago, and Rob believed that John and his team from Creative Leaps International were precisely what was needed in Albany at this moment. The goal was to get faculty to engage wholeheartedly in the strategic planning and this meant getting them to work not just with one another but also with senior administration. Relationships all around needed healing, rebuilding and rebooting, so ideas could flow.

**Rob’s work to this point had succeeded in getting departments to produce ‘futuring documents’** evaluating current and future trends in their fields and the world at large which could impact their departments and their work with students at the university. Now it to was time to engage more of the faculty and generate as many ideas as possible for bringing the university into the new world emerging before their eyes.

**The 2-day program conceived by Rob and John began with a special Concert of Ideas** designed expressly for the faculty and administrators who would be on hand – engaging, celebratory, thought-provoking and fun with plenty of artful triggers to “set minds and hearts in curious exploratory motion” at the same time re-sparking collegial relationships at every turn. On the way into the auditorium, Jim Stellar was greeted by deans and faculty alike with assorted grumbles and comments suggesting he was taking a big risk doing something like this. But true to form, the Concert of Ideas worked its magic and people were soon electrified and smiling ear to ear and suddenly Jim Stellar was a genius -- as he always was. Everyone moved off to the discussion circles that were awaiting them to process what had just happened and jump-start their idea generation. There was a buzz in every room and people talked into the night. The next morning, when they gathered again in the big room to report on their ideas with the full plenary and organize for a second round of creative discussions, a number of other faculty who had not been at the Concert of Ideas the night before, joined the meeting but could not understand why everyone was as so jazzed about what they were doing. What had happened to everyone? In the course of that second day, more than 300 exciting ideas had been mapped out for the strategic plan. The idea generation phase was complete. Here’s what Jim Stellar had to say about what he saw happening before his very eyes.

*“Thank you for an incredible Concert of Ideas yesterday and today. The further I get away from it (hours now), the more blown-away I am by what happened, what you all did. We really advanced the cause of strategic planning. But more than that, we advanced the cause of creating an enthusiastic forward-looking community on our campus. So many people told me what a risk we took doing this event and how wonderful it worked out. But what I liked even more than the fact that we had a high-quality event was that they also told me they felt refueled, enthusiastic about the future, happy to have met like-minded colleagues, and are looking forward to what we can do together. Thank you. Again, please for me thank all who helped you help us.”*

*James R. Stellar, Interim President University at Albany, SUNY*

THE REPORT

**Planning for the Renaissance Center at UAlbany**

**With full support from the university’s senior leadership** and a President’s Discretionary Grant from Carnegie already in place, plus the recent success among faculty with the university’s strategic planning initiative, the idea of the Renaissance Center arrived on campus in Albany with a great deal of good will and excitement going for it. Discussions with deans, department heads and program leaders were uniformly positive, though a little guarded given the budgetary stresses and general distrust leftover from years past. For the most part, however, optimism prevailed and discussions of potential collaborations proceeded in earnest. Our approach from the perspective of the Renaissance Center was not to be prescriptive, rather to be wholly in listening and learning mode, 100% attentive to the priorities and programming goals voiced by those leading a wide array of academic, campus life and community-oriented programs. We believed that listening, sharing and getting to know one another would go a long way in building trust and bringing the best ideas forward. We committed ourselves to looking for common ground, the common good and what we might achieve together with the time and resources available to us.

**Five Special Priorities aligned with the Strategic Plan** were identified and, with the help of the Interim President, were moved quickly into the hands of deans and program directors eager to collaborate with John Cimino and his Renaissance Center colleagues.

1. ***Elevating the quality of teaching across the university****: embedding Creativity into the institutional DNA, especially into Teaching and Course Design*
2. ***Greater interconnectedness across the institution****, especially in the form of interdisciplinary partnerships in both research and academics*
3. ***Better preparation of students as thoughtful and engaged citizens*** *and leaders of the future*
4. ***A stronger and more integrated role for the arts and humanities*** *across the university*
5. ***More vital engagement of the university*** *with the local community as well as the important global forces shaping our world.*

**In meetings with deans and program directors**, we reviewed existing programs and plans for their further development in combination with some fresh brainstorming and a survey of offerings and recommendations drawing upon the experience of the Renaissance Center’s Creative Leaps International team with other universities and research institutions around the globe. The first set of collaborations to be developed emerged from three faculty related programs, two from prominent university programs and one system level institute. Further information about each of these will follow later in this document.

**The Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership**

**The Department of Educational Policy and Leadership**

**SUNY’s Strategic, Academic, and Innovative Leadership (SAIL) Institute**

**Official Launching of the Renaissance Center at UAlbany**

**Three successive days of intensive, high visibility programs** were planned in strategic locations across the university campus with the following purposes in mind.

1. ***To introduce the Renaissance Center concept, its senior faculty*** *and programs to three key University constituencies*
2. ***To immerse participants in the unique methodology*** *of the Renaissance Center*
3. ***To invite collaborations and partnerships*** *with the Renaissance Center*
4. ***To generate ideas and spark new relationships among attendees*** *to benefit the mission and life of the University*
5. ***To demonstrate the Renaissance Center’s role as a convener*** *of diverse components and constituencies of the University.*

**April 26th:** **“A Concert of Ideas Exploring and Celebrating Innovation, Entrepreneurship and the Creative Economy”** followed by discussion circles and a report back to plenary. This event was designed in collaboration with **Innovate 518** and directed toward the entrepreneurship community, UAlbany faculty interested in innovation, and the growing “creative economy” in the Capital Region. (3.5 hours)

**April 27th: “A Concert of Ideas Exploring and Celebrating Imagination and Synergy, Creativity and Connectivity”** followed by discussion circles and a report back to plenary. This Gala event was designed in collaboration with the Office of the Provost to celebrate the launch of the Renaissance Center and engage University VIP administrators, faculty and staff plus Capital Region government and community leaders in discussions of the Renaissance Center’s future. (3.5 hours)

**April 28th:** **“A Concert of Ideas: Renaissance Here, Now, Tomorrow and from the Inside Out”** followed by discussion circles, a report back to plenary plus a set of three concurrent workshops linked to leadership, habits of excellence and stress management on campus and in life. This set of events and activities was specially designed for UAlbany students from the Blackstone Entrepreneurship Program, the Honors College, and the Educational Opportunity Program. (5.5 hours)

**As preparation for their participation** in these inaugural activities, students also participated in three 2-hour evening workshops scheduled in the weeks leading up to the 28th focusing **on “Creativity, Imagination and Self-Leadership”** in their daily lives, and led by Creative Leaps International president, John Cimino. (6.0 hours)

**The impact and 0utput generated by these three days of activities** exceeded expectations. Participants responded with high enthusiasm to the Concerts of Ideas, the performers and senior faculty of the Renaissance Center, the idea of the Renaissance Center and the discussions and workshops which followed. Participant reports from their post-concert discussion circles generated a wealth of constructive insights and ideas both for embedding the Renaissance Center in the life of the University and for initiating positive change in a variety of university programs and services. Transcripts of many of these conversations as well as video highlights of their reports to plenary are available for review. (see Appendix for highlights)

**Three Major Initiatives in Faculty Development, Teaching and Academic Leadership**

**(1) Creativity Fellows Program in Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership**

***The Purpose of the Creativity Fellows Program was threefold:***

1. ***Deliver a powerful developmental experience for a cohort of faculty fellows*** *– one that empowers them to become leaders in imaginative and innovative teaching,*
2. ***Elevate that faculty cohort as Creativity Fellows*** *by providing them a deep dive into the nature of creativity and the application of arts-integrated teaching practices across the disciplines*
3. ***Establish a strong, supportive infrastructure for Creativity Fellows*** *to excel both individually and collectively so they may lead UAlbany to prominence in innovative teaching.*

***Program Structure and Activities of the Creativity Fellows Program****:*

1. ***7 faculty members from 7 departments/schools participated in the program****, including one each from Criminal Justice, Writing and Critical Inquiry, Social Welfare, Music, Public Administration, Anthropology, and Education.*
2. ***The program began in Fall 2017 with 12 meetings in which the faculty focused on four overarching themes:*** *(i) the inner life of the teacher, self-knowledge and the formation of the self who teaches; (ii) the twin concepts of “orbital thinking” and “multiple lenses” in discovery learning and curiosity-driven, creative inquiry; (iii) the interplay of perception and belief in meaning-making, decision-making and our sense of the possible; and (iv) powering up imagination, intuition and the aesthetic capacity for felt knowledge as key enablers of effective, in-the-moment classroom teaching.*
3. ***The program’s spring component focused on applying the concepts of the initial 12 meetings to the development of new or revised courses in the Fellows’ respective fields.*** *The Spring component also consisted of 12 weekly meetings and aligned with the commencement of the Carnegie grant period (Spring 2018). As the new pedagogical techniques were embedded in their course planning documents, they were also ground tested among the Fellows themselves who offered support and assistance to one another.*
4. ***Both the fall and spring semesters were designed and facilitated by John Cimino****, who offered 5 additional sessions in May at the request of participants. Cimino also provided each of the Fellows with regular individual mentoring support.*
5. ***In the spring semester, Faculty Fellows received a course release*** *to better enable them to focus on their course development/redevelopment work.*

**The impact and output of the Creativity Fellows Program** were remarkably positive. All seven Creativity Fellows successfully completed both the fall and spring components of the program and began teaching their new or redeveloped courses the following fall with continued observation and mentoring support from John Cimino. Throughout the 24 weeks of the program, the Fellows produced several written accounts of their thought processes, evolving practices and philosophies. These wholly outstanding works are available for review as are their substantive evaluations of the program. Their comments and validations guided the next iteration of the program known as Creativity Partners Program for which they also served as mentors for the incoming cadre of faculty. (See appendix participant comments and evaluations)

**(2) Creativity Partners Program in Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership**

The Creativity Partners Program was developed as a 12-week successor to the 24-week Creativity Fellows Program in order to extend the life of this successful program through a State budgetary shortfall and the final phase of the Carnegie grant.

***The Purpose of the Creativity Partners Program remained significantly aligned with the original Fellows Program:***

1. ***Establish a learning community focused on the exploration of effective teaching,*** *one that empowers them to become leaders in imaginative and innovative teaching,*
2. ***Explore the nature of creativity and the application of arts-integrated teaching practices*** *across the disciplines*
3. ***Develop strategies for building a more reflective and innovative mindset*** *related to their own teaching*

***Program Structure and Activities of the Creativity Partners Program****:*

1. ***The work of the Creativity Partners was guided by John Cimino****, founder and president of Creative Leaps International, in collaboration with Billie Franchini, Interim Director of ITLAL. Partners made a one-semester commitment to the program. During this period, Partners became part of a learning community comprised of colleagues from multiple departments and disciplines dedicated to developing a deeper understanding of themselves as caring and authentic teachers as well as the nature of creativity and its role within creativity-enriched, arts-integrated approaches to teaching -- in all subject areas across the branches of knowledge. Ultimately, Partners were challenged to internalize these insights and understandings as a basis for transforming and innovating their personal pedagogical approach.*
2. ***The program began in Fall 2018 and ran through February 2019*** *for a total of 13 meetings in which participants focused on six overarching themes: • (i) the inner life of the teacher, self-knowledge and the formation of the self who teaches; (ii) the twin concepts of “orbital thinking” and “multiple lenses” in discovery learning and curiosity-driven, creative inquiry; (iii) how we want students to be changed by the experience of our courses; (iv) how to engage students so they are motivated to change in meaningful ways; (v) the interplay of perception and belief in meaning-making, decision-making and our sense of the possible; and (vi) powering up imagination, intuition and the aesthetic capacity for felt knowledge as key enablers of effective, in-the-moment classroom teaching.*

**The impact and output of the Creativity Partners Program** were also entirely positive. All five Creativity Partners successfully completed the 13 sessions of the of the program, and midway through, of their own accord, began implementing aspects of our arts, interdisciplinary and creativity-based pedagogy into courses they were currently teaching or planning. In the final sessions of the program, each of the three senior faculty participants produced a creative synthesis or manifesto capturing aspects of their thinking and learning throughout the program. The Creativity Partners also completed an evaluation of the program available for review.

**(3) The Educational Policy and Leadership Program**

***The Purpose of the Educational Policy Leadership Program was twofold***:

1. ***Under the auspices of the UAlbany School Leadership Institute*** *and in partnership with the Capital Area School Development Association and the University at Albany School of Education, the Renaissance Center’s Creative Leaps International team completed the design and implementation of a multi-day summer workshop underscoring the key relationship between creativity and leadership in the formative process of developing educational leaders.*
2. *Importantly, these summer events also served as a catalyst for the redesign of the University’s School Leadership Certification Program.*

***Program Events and Activities***

**July 10th: “A Concert of Ideas entitled “Releasing Imagination in a Time of Accelerated Change”: Exploring and Celebrating the Future of School Leadership**, followed by discussion circles and a report back to plenary. This event was designed in collaboration with Jason Lane of the UAlbany School Leadership Institute and James Butterworth of Capital Area School Development Association. Performed and facilitated by Creative Leaps International under the banner of the Renaissance Center at UAlbany.

**July 16th:** **“Leadership, Change, Multiple Lenses and Cultures”**, a half-day workshop developed and facilitated by Renaissance Center/Creative Leaps president John Cimino for participants enrolled in the School Leadership Institute. Workshop overview follows:

***Underlying leadership are many forms of knowledge,*** *not least self-knowledge and an intuitive appreciation of how our perceptions and beliefs and those of others are entangled in webs of individual personal and cultural experience. Philosophers have declared that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but the “beholder’s share” (what we bring to each moment of experience) extends well beyond our perception of beauty to virtually all our meaning making, beliefs and relationships. In a fast-paced culture of change and ever-increasing diversity, the perceptions of many diverse minds are a constant, moment to moment puzzle for us to solve. As we open our minds and hearts to the richness of today’s communities, we must sharpen our awareness of the multiple lenses through which we and everyone around us are peering, looking and endeavoring to comprehend the world and one another.*

**The impact and output of the Educational Policy Leadership Program** were uniformly excellent. Participants in the events of July 10th and the 16th responded with high enthusiasm to their experience of the both Concerts of Ideas and the discussions and workshops which followed. Participant reports from their post-concert discussion circles generated a wealth of insights and clearly articulated aspirations to effectively launch these educators on their leadership journeys of personal and professional development. A video record of their reports to plenary is available for review.

**Leadership and Consultation Role of the Renaissance Center President**

***Goals and Responsibilities***

1. ***To lead the development of Renaissance Center enterprise*** *both in its inward facing mission on the UAlbany Campus and its outward facing mission as an emerging national and international institution*
2. ***To problem-solve all day to day challenges*** *linked to the functioning and finances of the Renaissance Center per the Carnegie grant and UAlbany’s various administrative bodies.*

***University Lawyers Discover a Prohibitive New York State Regulation***

In the second half of the grant period, we adapted to newly unfolding information concerning the feasibility of UAlbany as a home and founding venue for the Renaissance Center.  We learned that because of a New York State regulation known as ORE 9500, the university was not permitted to provide dedicated no cost on-campus space to the Renaissance Center or any other independent, nonprofit entity in exchange for that organization’s programming and associated grant support, although this was precisely the premise of the relationship with the Renaissance Center as represented in the grant/partnership document filed with Carnegie.

*The University at Albany will provide dedicated and customized space as home and operational center to the Renaissance Center and its nonprofit founders of Creative Leaps International, including high quality administrative facilities together with the conference, performance, and studio space necessary to accommodate activities.*

Although some alternate pathways were suggested and explored, such as foregoing its independence and becoming a center “of” the university governed by the university or paying rent for space off-campus, these alternatives did not meet the requirements and expectations of Creative Leaps International (CLI) or the original offer of support from Carnegie, and it was determined that it was best to pursue other alternatives as a home for the Center.  It was nonetheless agreed that Creative Leaps International, rather than discontinue the delivery of its programs at this juncture, would wholeheartedly complete the implementation of all programs specified by the grant, thereby fulfilling all the requirements for a highly successful pilot year at UAlbany.

***Sample Inputs and Outputs from the final 6 months***

* *Worked in collaboration with Provost James Stellar to design a path forward for the implementation of all remaining grant funded Renaissance Center programs despite the unfavorable outcome of the ORE 9500 determination prohibiting a Renaissance Center home on the UAlbany campus.*
* *In recognition of budget reductions imposed on the university, continued to work with Provost James Stellar to strategize the successful completion of all Renaissance Center programs while reducing supporting costs to the University.*
* *To make the best use of remaining Carnegie dollars earmarked for continuation of the ITLAL Creativity Fellows Program -- in the absence of any UAlbany support for faculty incentives and course releases -- collaborated with ITLAL Director, Billie Franchini, on the design of a 12-week edition of last year’s 24-week program to be offered this year without faculty incentives as the Creativity Partners Program.*
* *In deference to the ORE 9500 ruling, cancelled invitations to speak before the Faculty Senate along with participation in follow-up planning activities with other campus groups which had been premised on the continued development of the Renaissance Center at UAlbany.*
* *In light of the ORE 9500 announcement and together with Provost James Stellar, consulted with Carnegie president, Vartan Gregorian, to plan an alternate future for the Renaissance Center.*
* *Based on Vartan Gregorian’s recommendation, began efforts to meet with SUNY Chancellor Katrina Johnson and SUNY Provost Tod Laursen to discuss a partnership between the Renaissance Center and SUNY at the system level. An initial meeting took place on January 30th. Additional meetings are currently in planning.*
* *Attended the GRLI Deans and Directors Cohort at UVM focused on embedding principles and practices of Sustainable Development in the core programs of business schools and universities worldwide.*
* *During this second segment of the grant year, completed the process of incorporation of the Renaissance Center as an independent nonprofit entity in the State of New York obtaining its own EIN identification, its official nonprofit designation from the IRS and its registration with the New York State Charities Registration Bureau.*
* *Solidified the Renaissance Center’s founding Board of Directors and legal team.*
* *Continued to recruit acclaimed scholars, business leaders, artists, scientists and writers to the Renaissance Center’s International Advisory Council.*
* *Continued to establish relationships with several national/international partners for the Renaissance Center, including the UN Globally Engaged Universities Initiative, the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, the Center for Creative Leadership, the National Resilience Institute, the Frances Hesselbein /Peter Drucker Leader to Leader Institute, and Association for Managers of Innovation.*

**Finances**

**As noted in the Introduction,** the Renaissance Centercompleted its 18-month pilot year at the University at Albany with funding from two principal sources: the University President’s Office, Dr. James R. Stellar, interim president, and a President’s Discretionary Grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Dr. Vartan Gregorian, president.

**The University’s contribution** came in two parts: an initial $50,ooo in the fall of 2017 (a) to jumpstart the faculty development initiative known as the Creativity Fellows Program in advance of the arrival of Carnegie funds and (b) to support initial meetings with senior faculty and staff in preparation for the arrival of the Renaissance Center; and an additional $55,450 in the spring of 2018 concurrent with the arrival of the Carnegie Grant to support four particular budget lines: (i) course buyouts and stipends for faculty enrolled in the new Creativity Fellows Program (ii) project management of the Creativity Fellows Program by the University’s ITLAL Director, (iii) partial program support for the three large scale events slated to launch the Renaissance Center that spring, and (iv) coverage of travel and accommodations for the Creative Leaps International team linked to their program services.

**The President’s Discretionary Grant from the Carnegie Corporation** of New York arrived in the spring of 2018 in the amount of $200,000. Its broad purpose was to fund the creation of the Renaissance Center and underwrite initial programming during the pilot year. The funding channel selected for this purpose was the University’s Research Foundation which retained 9% or $18,000 of the grant amount for its services. The founders and originators of the Renaissance Center concept tasked with its design and the development and implementation of all its programs received the remaining Carnegie funds ($182,000) in four installments linked to budgeted quarterly expenses by arrangement with the University Research Foundation. These funds covered all the program activities, teaching, mentoring and leadership functions elaborated in this REPORT.

**In-kind contributions** from the University, including significant dedicated staff time from the Provost’s Office ($35,000), pro bono services provided by Renaissance Center founder John Cimino ($34,300), and extensive pricing discounts from Creative Leaps International ($59,800) also featured prominently in the support of the Renaissance Center’s pilot year.

**Reflections, Observations and Recommendations**

**My dear friend, Maxine Greene (1917-2014)** was as fond of quoting John Dewey as I am of quoting her quoting him: She said, “John Dewey said that imagination is thinking of things as if they could be otherwise. It’s a defiance of the taken-for-granted, of the fixed. A kind of deliberate effort to break through what you assume to be true. To think of alternative possibilities. And to believe that something more is possible. In other words, you value what is ‘not yet’ and work to bring it into being.”

**The creation of the Renaissance Center has been just such an endeavor** -- for me and a close circle of steadfast, wise and innovative partners. Our efforts have been a constant learning, a constant thinking and rethinking of our value proposition and its place in world. It has also been a test of personal dedication and will, “Moving with your whole will in one direction wholeheartedly” Kierkegaard. I have this quote posted just above my desk in my own handwriting and find myself leaning into its encouragements needfully almost every day.

**Bringing the Renaissance Center to the University at Albany** has been a challenging mix of excitement, joy, inspiration and frustration. I feel privileged to have worked closely with so many gifted, dedicated and caring educators. First among them is Jim Stellar, as provost and interim president, the first to champion the Renaissance Center concept and always its most ardent and creative advocate. Likewise, Jim’s brilliant, young assistant, Elizabeth Gray, whose instincts and insights kept us both on track managing details and holding the big picture. Brava! Also and very importantly, Jason Lane, Elga Wulfert, Darrell Wheeler, Billie Franchini, Jim Butterworth, Winsome Foderingham, Richard Becker, Paul Grandahl, Bill Hedberg, Ann Marie Murray, Martha Asselin, Matthew Grattan, Nilanjan Sen, Angela Datri, and with great affection all the Creativity Fellows and Partners, both this year and last: Salome Raheim, Edmund Stazyk, Andrea Kordzek, Eve Baldwin, Sean Rafferty, Kelly Eissman, Duncan Cumming, Juliette Gutmann, Frankie Bailey, Jennifer Dodge, Maria Haji-Georgi, and Erin Faeth. I will also remember Bill “the parking lot guy” and his three helpers, students Josh, Frankie and Matt, whose kindness and warm welcome greeted me every day I drove in to campus. I am grateful to each one of these good people and to President Havidan Rodriguez for his warm professional greeting at our every encounter.

**Change is difficult** for virtually all institutions and particularly challenging in the field of higher education. The University at Albany is no exception. It sits on the verge of greatness as a top-notch research university but is also captive to an infrastructure which favors the status quo and makes change difficult. Innovation and transformation are clearly the goal, but the honey thick day to day milieu is daunting and wears a lot of people out.

**The Renaissance Center arrived at UAlbany** carrying with it a blast of fresh air. The response was joyful, remarkable, heart-felt and renewing. A wave of positivity seemed to sweep through the campus and transformations small and large began to feel doable. Collaboration across differences acquired a new energy. ‘Let’s build the airplane as we’re flying it.’ The prospect of working together made it feel possible.

**When the 9500 ruling came down**, it came down in the midst of this buoyancy and was difficult to accept. Alternative pathways were proposed which ran contrary to the Renaissance Center’s legal status as an independent nonprofit. Barred from providing the Renaissance Center a home on campus, what could be done? No one in administration felt comfortable petitioning the Chancellor for a waiver. The agreement between the Renaissance Center and the university seemed to be breaking down.

**But good will prevailed.**  Our Renaissance Center/Creative Leaps International board and leadership team decided the default was blameless and agreed to complete all the projects written into the Carnegie grant. The pilot year proved to be a tour de force for the Renaissance Center with everyone pulling out all the stops, making every minute and every dollar count.

**Since then, at the urging of Vartan Gregorian** and in cooperation with my board chairman, we have brought offers of partnership at the system level to the Chancellors and Provosts of both SUNY and CUNY where discussions are still under way. We don’t yet know what will happen. However, Vartan Gregorian’s proclamation that “the Renaissance Center is a demonstration project for the nation” is still our guiding mantra.

***Recommendations***

There are extraordinary pockets of good and extraordinarily good and brilliant teachers and leaders working in the interstices of this diverse university complex. Celebrate the good.

Risk change. Disturb the status quo. Think of things as if they could be otherwise. Defy the taken-for-granted, the fixed. Believe that something more is possible.

This university is not yet where it wants to be or needs to be. Do not lose sight of the “not yet”. Work to bring it into being. Move forward with your whole will in one direction wholeheartedly.

**Vision for the Future**

**Having successfully completed its pilot year** at the University at Albany, the next step for the Renaissance Center will establish its more permanent home at a major university or university system that will serve also as its primary education partner. A network of other partners, both academic and non-academic, from across multiple industries and sectors will further enrich the Renaissance Center’s ecosystem and drive a range of collaborative projects and client work worldwide.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has put a hold on so many important projects across all sectors, our Renaissance Center leadership team has used this time to deepen key relationships with institutional partners and advisors around the globe and to innovate in our own field designing virtual offerings accessible now and in the future.

**The time for Renaissance thinking is now**, the time for creativity and connectivity is now. It is time to believe that something more is possible and to work to bring it into being.

**Epilogue**

**Mark P. Rice, Chairman of the Board of Directors for The Renaissance Center**; former Provost and currently Professor of Entrepreneurship at Babson College

February 26, 2021

John Cimino and I first met more than fifty years ago as freshmen at our alma mater, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. A decade ago John reconnected with me when I had just started my new role as inaugural Dean of the business school at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and invited me to join him in the second-round conference of the United Nations 50 + 20 Project to be hosted by St. Gallen University in Switzerland. The 50 + 20 Project aims to develop a new vision of management education for the world – one that empowers business schools to develop leaders with the knowledge, mindset and skillset to address global grand challenges, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Inspired by the 50 + 20 conference and by John’s leadership, I stayed connected to him and his vision of expanding the three-decade success story of Creative Leaps International into the launch of the Renaissance Center concept. The coming together of the Carnegie Corporation of New York under the leadership of Vartan Gregorian and the University at Albany under the leadership of Jim Stellar provided a fantastic opportunity to prototype and test the concept in a seed-funded pilot project -- and the pilot project was wildly successful, as captured in this Report.

Even before the successful completion of the pilot project, we – John and his team of advisors and supporters – began exploring Phase II. Our vision has always been that the University at Albany would be the first node in a network of Renaissance Centers. Under John’s leadership, we have begun a series of discussions with senior leaders at a half dozen universities with the goal of launching a portfolio of pilot projects designed to explore how best to adapt the Renaissance Center concept to the most compelling challenges each university faces. In spite of the disruption going on in higher education, universities remain the major force in shaping future leaders of private enterprises, governments, NGOs, universities and social enterprises. Developing future leaders, in collaboration with universities, who have the imagination, synergy, creativity and connectivity to address the global grand challenges remains the strategic focus and driving imperative of John Cimino and the Renaissance Center(s).

**APPENDIX**

**Summary of Key Decision Points**

**Vartan Gregorian**

**(1) “Now is the time to launch your Renaissance Center…”**

**(2) “…you tell Jim Stellar that Vartan says we’re going to start the Renaissance Center right there at the University at Albany and that we will do it together.”**

 **(3) “…the relationship of the Renaissance Center to the University should be characterized by the word “at” rather than “of” so as to maintain independence of the two entities.”**

**(4) …even as the Renaissance Center would be launched at the University at Albany and be very successful there, we needed to think of this as a “demonstration project for the nation”**

**(5) …the decision to fund the launch of the Renaissance Center with a President’s Discretionary Grant from Carnegie**

**Jim Stellar**

**(1) hiring John Cimino and Creative Leaps International to work with the faculty on the development of the university’s strategic plan using a Concert of Ideas to jumpstart the process**

**(2) accepting the invitation from Vartan and John to launch the Renaissance Center at UAlbany**

**(3) making teaching and faculty development the first priority of the Renaissance Center at UAlbany**

**(4) choosing to fund the Creativity Fellows Program directly from the President’s Office in advance of the arrival of the Carnegie Grant**

**John Cimino**

**(1) using a non-prescriptive “listening approach” seeking common ground and the common good when working with deans and program directors seeking to partner with the Renaissance Center**

**(2) designing the launch activities of the Renaissance Center to encompass three broad university constituencies: (a) the regional innovation and entrepreneurship community, (b) VIP leaders from senior administration, the university board of directors, the faculty, neighboring institutions and Albany city government, and (c) students from three important university programs: Blackstone Entrepreneurship Program, the Honors College, and the Educational Opportunity Program.**

**(3) Six months into the Carnegie grant period, when a New York State regulation known as ORE 9500 was discovered by university lawyers effectively blocking fulfillment of the university’s promise to provide dedicated space for the Renaissance Center, our Creative Leaps International and Renaissance Center leadership team, rather than call a halt to programs at the university, elected to hold the university blameless and to wholeheartedly complete the implementation of all programs specified by the Carnegie grant, thereby fulfilling all the requirements for a highly successful pilot year at UAlbany.**

**Sample Ideas Emerging from April 27th Launch Event with University VIP administrators**, faculty and staff plus Capital Region government and community leaders.

***Enrich*** *creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship in the academic curriculum*

***Strengthen*** *academic programs by integrating concepts of creativity and leadership in the approach to teaching and the content of the curriculum*

***Expand*** *social-intellectual programming, providing an exciting, informal space to share ideas, connect with others through inquiry, and create a culture of intellectualism that highlights the rich intellectual resources on campus*

***Bring*** *the arts to the public, enriching the campus environment and creating spontaneous opportunities for inspired reflection and discussion*

***Develop*** *experiential learning opportunities for students in humanities and arts to highlight the inherent value and important application to society*

***Facilitate*** *interdisciplinary scholarship, through environmental and informal methods as well as through adjustments to formal mechanisms and incentive structures*

***Work*** *across campus identifying enthusiastic champions among the faculty, students and administrators and collaborating to meet goals*

***Engage*** *and support the broader capital district community*

***Encourage*** *thoughtful, engaged, and empathetic citizenship through the development of tools of critical inquiry, communication, reflection and understanding in the student body*

***Support*** *existing campus-wide initiatives to enhance the role of humanities in the academic culture and curriculum in creative juxtaposition with engineering, science and business*

**Comments from professors participating in the Creativity Fellows Program** in Teaching, Learning and Leadership lead by John Cimino, president of Creative Leaps International and founder of the Renaissance Center (June 2018)

*To know that the university values teaching enough to have a program like this enriched my thinking even before the very first meeting.*

*I loved the discussions and the collegial nature of the meetings. I felt like I found other professors with whom I could truly connect, and it was incredibly rewarding.*

*I am now much more willing to explore new approaches in my teaching.*

*The program expanded my understanding of the concepts of art and creativity in connection with other areas of knowledge.*

*I gained a new language and expanded perspective about using imagination in the classroom as a path to access ways of knowing beyond cognition.*

***John Cimino's knowledge and experience*** *is truly impressive. He has a way of including everyone in a very diverse group of participants in discussions or directed activities. Pretty much no matter what came up in our discussions, he had had some past experience or background knowledge to bring to bear on the topic. He is a very effective and dedicated teacher.*

***John was a superb leader for this program****. The breadth and depth of his knowledge and experience with the arts and creativity in learning and leadership are astounding (e.g., performing, Creative Leaps). He effectively led the seminar by providing a wide range of learning resources and structuring the learning experience with a balance of didactic, experiential, and participant-led learning activities.*

***I love the perspective that John brought to this****. He knew so many texts and people and concepts that we could work with. His mind works in a completely different way than mine. I am very much a linear thinker but he introduced us to the concept of orbital thinking, and this idea of orbital thinking makes so much sense to me as a way to prepare students to understand ideas. It was the way that he taught us and it’s the way that hopefully I’ll be able to integrate not only into my own learning but into teaching students. Furthermore, he took tons of time that he simply didn’t have to meet with us individually to encourage us, to review our work and mentor us, and simply to make us feel that we could be a success at what we are doing.*

***John was an incredibly good mentor****. I’m not someone who is comfortable with the vulnerability of being mentored, and I told John that on the first day. But John didn’t give up on me. He worked with me on the issues that I was having in planning the class; he listened to my life struggles as they were interfering with my academic work; and he didn’t judge me for my life reasons that were blocking my ability to be mentored. John is one of the kindest most understanding men I have ever met.*