

the Liberator

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COUNCIL
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BLOCK PARTY: PROMOTING CREATIVITY AND THE NEA

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Written by Grace Schrobilgen

On April 26th 2017, a student organization called Creative 40 Acres hosted a “block pARTy” on UT’s East Mall. This event was meant to give students the chance to watch performances, observe visual art pieces, and release stress during the second-to-last week of classes. Creative 40 Acres is primarily made up of fine arts majors, and their main goal is to advocate for not only the College of Fine Arts, or even the arts, but creativity in general.

Sponsored by the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and the Dean of Students, one of the organization’s most important responsibilities is to award up to \$1,000 to individually-initiated student projects. They decided to provide these funds to individuals rather than organizations because this is the type of project for which they saw the largest gap in the availability of money.

While their own fine arts programs generally receive little funding, the members of Creative 40 Acres still want to recognize the importance of all students having access to some type of creative outlet. Through their Ask Prometheus fund, they are able to initiate opportunities for this.

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Lizzy Tan, a senior Economics and Dance major and one of the people who spearheaded block pARTy said,

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“Universities are, above all else, places for people to think and grow. However, you cannot have innovation without creativity.”

Creative 40 Acres hopes to allow students who feel they no longer have enough time to dedicate to artistic pastimes the opportunity to engage in that mindset throughout their busy weeks.

“Integrating creative and cultural experiences within the campus helps foster interdisciplinary thinking, which allows for more innovation in more interesting and groundbreaking ways.” Because they learn new methods of thinking, students who dedicate even a small amount of time each week to being creative may begin to find new ways of approaching problems they will encounter in their academic careers.



A flyer for the block pARTy event posted on Creative 40 Acres' Facebook page. Graphic by Anna Steinhagen.

This event, while not overtly political, was a means of encouraging UT students to appreciate and participate in art while also provoking conversations about what is happening to the arts on a national scale. Part of President Trump's plan for his first 100 days in office

2016) included eliminating funding altogether for the National Endowment for the Arts, which provides the money required to maintain programs like the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and thousands of art-oriented after-school programs.

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It is commonly believed that the NEA mostly funds projects like large museums in affluent cities. In reality, it mostly benefits rural areas. The defunding of programs in these underserved communities could take away some children's only opportunity to access an artistic outlet. The funds for the NEA comprised only 0.004% of the total federal budget in 2015, yet Trump still wants to reallocate this money towards alternative projects.



The logo of the National Endowment for the Arts.

While Congress voted to keep the NEA alive back in May, the arts continue to be cut from public schools and the government continues to shuffle the federal budget around, funneling money out of programs that they deem unnecessary. The arts still need people to advocate for them.

Taylor Bui, a junior Government and International Relations and Global Studies major with a focus in international security, is one of the members of Creative 40 Acres who is not a fine arts major. She, too, discussed the influence of the arts on her studies and voiced her opinions on President Trump's plan to defund the NEA.

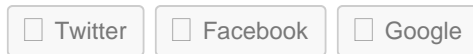
"If it does eventually happen, it's going to divide the nation even more because everyone involved with the arts will be ostracized," she said. "By cutting funds for the things people love, he could make it even more difficult to move forward and gain their support for any of his other initiatives." Even though it doesn't directly affect her education, Bui feels strongly that the NEA should be continue to be

funded.

The arts are important for creating not only a productive country but a productive college campus. The coexistence of academics and the arts produces a more diverse population of well-rounded students who have creative insights, better problem-solving skills, and varied perspectives.

Featured image by Creative 40 Acres.

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