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## Our History

The DaVinci Institute

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### Recommended Citation

The DaVinci Institute, "Our History" (2006). *Documents*. 9.  
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## **OUR HISTORY**

In 1997, the Kirkpatrick Foundation convened a meeting of faculty from the various arts departments of public and private universities and colleges in Oklahoma. The purpose was to identify resources and possible collaborative opportunities that would ultimately heighten Oklahoma's cultural education climate. The group continued to meet regularly, and over time friendships and partnerships were developed among campus faculty of singular institutions as well as among faculty across institutional lines.

A strategic planning process led to the formalization of this group of outstanding and dedicated leaders in higher education. The DaVinci Institute, established in 1998 as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, functions as an Oklahoma think-tank whose mission is to promote a statewide creative renaissance through lectures, workshops, professional development, research and advocacy.

During the first few years of operation, the DaVinci Institute focused on three primary goals: 1) improving K-12 education, 2) sharing arts resources, and 3) raising public awareness of arts and cultural offerings at higher education institutions. To begin their collaborative work in K-12 education, the DaVinci Institute received funding from the Kirkpatrick Foundation for a joint research project that resulted in the initiation of Oklahoma A+ Schools. A+ Schools is a whole school reform model which maintains that two-way integration of the arts in curriculum plays a central role in how children learn.

With start-up funds from the Kirkpatrick Foundation, Oklahoma A+ Schools began in Oklahoma during the 2002-03 academic year with 14 elementary schools and has grown to include 31 schools throughout Oklahoma in 2005-06. This nationally recognized program now operates within the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma.

Another effort to accomplish these goals was achieved through the ongoing DaVinci Lecture Series which brings nationally and internationally recognized education experts to Oklahoma on a quarterly basis to share the most current thinking on relevant arts and cultural topics with community stakeholders. This lecture series provides opportunities for professional development for educators and students statewide. Since 2001, the series has included such distinguished speakers as Dr. Richard Florida, Professor of Regional and Economic Policy from Carnegie Mellon University; Dr. Bulent Atalay, Professor of Physics and author from Mary Washington College and the University of Virginia; Barbara Shepherd, Director of the Partners in Education Program from the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington D.C.; Elliot W. Eisner, Stanford University; Sir Ken Robinson, Senior Advisory to the J. Paul Getty Trust; Dr. Brian Lang, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of St. Andrews, Scotland; David Kennard, documentary filmmaker and president and co-founder of Independent Communication Associates, Inc; and Nelson Shanks, internationally renowned portraitist.

In an attempt to encourage Oklahoma's best and brightest educators, the DaVinci Institute established the DaVinci Scholars program. Outstanding graduates from Oklahoma colleges and universities are recognized for their creative teaching methods and inspiration for students in classrooms of Oklahoma schools. DaVinci Scholars teach in both rural and urban Oklahoma schools providing an enhanced and creative educational atmosphere for both students and colleagues. Their exemplary teaching leaves a legacy of educational excellence in these communities.

The future for the DaVinci Institute is as bright as its past accomplishments. Through an ongoing strategic planning process that began during the summer of 2004, an expanded vision and goals have been embraced and a formal strategic plan is being implemented to direct the Institute to incorporate all facets of creativity in Oklahoma's education. The DaVinci Institute is a unique organization in both its mission and its collaborative composition.

The DaVinci Institute, "Oklahoma's Creativity Think-Tank," will work with Oklahoma's stakeholders to expand the creative process on diverse horizons, building a network of educators and thinkers that will allow open discussion into creativity across all disciplines. DaVinci Institute and Oklahoma A+ Schools have developed an exciting partnership with Oklahoma Educational Television Authority in the development of the Oklahoma Creativity Project, which will ultimately focus national attention on the creativity generated by Oklahomans and their communities.

In 2006, the DaVinci Institute will maintain its focus on creativity, imagination, and innovation in fulfilling its

mission to promote a statewide creative renaissance and to recognize the creativity of Oklahomans. To achieve these goals, DaVinci will continue to build academic and community partnerships, programming, and public awareness to nurture the Arts, Sciences, Humanities, and Education in Oklahoma as these fields undergo transformations in the Twenty-First Century.

Working with our partners in the Oklahoma Creativity Project, DaVinci will become the central clearinghouse to document Oklahoma's own creativity by establishing an online Oklahoma Creativity Directory and will host a series of forums and conferences that focus on imagination, creativity, and innovation. These symposia will feature local, national, and international speakers recognized for their forward thinking and insight into these topics. Promoted regionally, nationally, and internationally, these events will play an important role in enhancing awareness of Oklahoma as both a major national resource and a highly desirable location to live, work, and raise families.

Using the theme, "New Media," DaVinci Institute initiatives include a media fair, public lectures, and master classes that explore the ever-changing, innovative, and creative world of technology and its impact.

The DaVinci Institute will award the first DaVinci Fellows Award in 2006. Acting on the premise that creative thought and insight are fundamental components of extraordinary scholarship, invention, teaching, and performance across academic disciplines, this award recognizes Oklahoma higher education faculty whose accomplishments reflect a creative approach and a high degree of innovation to complex issues and have made a significant contribution to their academic discipline.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.davinciok.org](http://www.davinciok.org). or contact Ms. Billi Kaye Meacham, Executive Director, DaVinci Institute, P.O. Box 108850, Oklahoma City, OK 73101, Phone: (405) 225-9134.