

# UA's Interdisciplinary Confluentcenter Fosters New Ideas, Networks Through People and Place

The history of modern higher education was built upon fields of knowledge where disparate disciplines had little interaction and creative minds focused on highly specialized forms of inquiry.



Javier Durán, director of the UA Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry with graduate students who are part of the cohort of 2013-2014 Confluentcenter Graduate Fellows. (Photo courtesy of the UA Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry).

But the model for research and teaching has changed in recent decades as universities have recognized the value that comes from reaching across disciplines to address big challenges. At the University of Arizona, that practice has been taken a step farther through a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort that seeks to advance contemporary modes of creative inquiry and engagement around issues related to the human condition.

It was five years ago that a group of UA faculty came together to brainstorm an idea for a new, innovative and interdisciplinary initiative unlike anything that had been done at other U.S. higher education institutions.

Those early conversations engendered campus-wide and community support for what is now the UA Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry, an institute devoted to supporting a dynamic, interdisciplinary and intellectual environment around the arts, humanities and social sciences.

While comparable centers and institutes often have a narrowly defined focus, Confluentcenter was tasked with uniting three large and robust areas of inquiry. It was the UA's most comprehensive, administrative-level investment in an effort supporting the three colleges, each of them a critical element of a premier university.

That investment and subsequent support have enhanced intellectual life on and off the UA campus. Members of the Confluentcenter bring together people of different backgrounds, experiences and beliefs to generate and support creative new approaches to social, humanistic and artistic inquiry and achievement. One example: the city of Tucson and area businesses have been working to create more visible linkages with the university to help invigorate economic development and cultural cohesion.

Through public outreach and the funding of grants and fellowships,

the Confluentcenter helps deepen our understanding of grand challenges. Its efforts create resources that help enable community development, cross-cultural and transnational partnership, and artistic achievement throughout the many communities of which the UA is a part.

Since it was founded, the Confluentcenter has awarded more than \$1 million in grants and fellowships to UA faculty and graduate students. Recent projects have created ways to better understand home-ownership and mortgage indebtedness and how three-dimensional Web-based instruction can improve student learning.

"We are fostering a true confluence of people and ideas," Javier Durán, the center's director, noted in a letter about the history and evolution of Confluentcenter. "This is an exciting endeavor, as we are poised to become the nation's premier center for interdisciplinary and creative research in the arts, humanities and social sciences."