For many, the worlds of art and business don’t always line up. After all, the organizational structures of many art institutions seem to discourage financial viability, and artists of all kinds grimace at the mere mention of finance or marketing—right? Well, not quite. As with most things, the relationship between business and the arts is a complex one, and the boundary between the two is constantly being redefined. The business world and the arts community are at a crossroads, and there is a student group at the University of Michigan that is actively working to bring the two together.

Arts Enterprise is a groundbreaking, interdisciplinary club that caters to the needs of students in the Ross School of Business, the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, as well as other students, staff, and faculty throughout the university community. Founded in 2006 by Kelly Dylla (MBA ’08), Chris Genteel (MBA ‘08), Nate Zeisler (DMA ‘07), and musicology faculty member Mark Clague, Arts Enterprise provides a forum through which students can bounce ideas off one another. The student-run group emphasizes creative leadership and cultural engagement, providing Beyond Talent workshops, speaker series, collaborative events, and service opportunities for all who are interested. Kelly Dylla, co-president of Arts Enterprise, sums up the group’s mission best: “Arts Enterprise is about breaking down stereotypes of what it means to be an artist and what it means to be a business person. Both can benefit from learning a little bit from each other. Musicians can learn how to enhance their careers by developing a bit of business savvy and business students can enhance their educations and lives by learning something about the skill-set of artists, as well as learning about the arts themselves.”

After coming to Michigan this past summer, I found out about Arts Enterprise through a colleague and asked myself, as a graduate student in musicology, what does this have to do with me? In this day and age, where infinite possibilities exist for students looking to get involved in extracurricular activities, groups have to convince students that their mission is one worth their time. It quickly became clear to me that Arts Enterprise was more than just worth my time—it provided me an outlet for entrepreneurship that otherwise was not available to students involved in the arts.

Arts entrepreneurship is a burgeoning field that helps artists self-create career paths through the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. At the University of Michigan, Arts Enterprise strives to provide these skills for interested artists by collaborating with business students and providing creative outlets and speaker series that address the issues that all students struggle with: How can I enrich my professional profile while enriching my life? Arts Enterprise provides similar opportunities for business students, sponsoring events and collaborations that help spark the artistic imaginations and creative juices of future financial analysts or arts administrators.

With multi-disciplinary workshops and events featuring the likes of hip-hop artist Toni Blackman, composer Derek Bermel, arts administrator, consultant, and educator John McCann, and Ross Career Development Director Al Cotrone, Arts Enterprise has garnered considerable support across campus.
Eric Booth—a Juilliard-based teaching artist, actor, and entrepreneur—spent nearly a week at Michigan, thanks to the generous support of the University Musical Society, the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, and the Ross School of Business. Booth’s residency brought hundreds of students, faculty, and staff from disparate departments and schools together to explore creative engagement and innovative leadership. The result was a truly remarkable experience for all those who attended and participated in any of his multiple interactive workshops.

Arts Enterprise also provides service opportunities for students on both local and national scales. School of Music, Theatre & Dance senior Emily Weingarten (bassoon performance and musicology, ’08) has used Arts Enterprise as a conduit for organizing the exciting service and outreach program, Enharmonia. This project has provided an outlet for members of select MT&D ensembles to teach and communicate with students from local public schools. Recognizing that these students represent the future audience for live, classical music, Weingarten has used Enharmonia to help foster enthusiasm and open discourse among young performers and listeners.

Arts Enterprise for New Orleans (AE4NOLA) is an action-based service-learning project that seeks to support New Orleans education and revitalization efforts in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. With the help of Arts Enterprise, a select group of university students will participate in community-based research and documentation through a partnership with New Orleans Outreach, a nonprofit education services provider and organizer. This project will culminate with a trip to New Orleans in the first weeks of May 2008, with the hope that the ensuing data collection and analysis will act as a national model for educational outreach. The project will ask students to work across disciplines, schools, and interests to think creatively and lead one another in finding important solutions to real problems.

Arts Enterprise will continue to play a vital role in exploring the endless possibilities that collaboration and ingenuity inevitably create, not only at Michigan, but across the nation. Several members of the group traveled to North Carolina this past July to present papers at the Brevard Conference on Music Entrepreneurship, putting Michigan at the cutting edge of this budding field. Arts Enterprise is unique not only in its mission, but also in its leadership. The group was born from inquisitive student minds, and remains an action-based student collaboration, organized ‘from the ground up,’ with ample guidance from selfless faculty advisors such as Mark Clague. Slowly, other schools are beginning to take Michigan’s lead and address issues of arts entrepreneurship, offering curricular and non-curricular activities to benefit students across all fields.

Artists have a lot to glean from business, and business can learn a thing or two from artistic inspiration and thought. Arts Enterprise provides a wealth of experience and resources for anyone interested in exploring the intersection of these two fields, and allows students to acquire leadership and communication skills by doing.

To find out more about Arts Enterprise and our future events, visit www.artsenterprisemi.com, or email artsenterprise@umich.edu.

**UPDATE**: Arts Enterprise was just awarded the U-M Ginsberg Center Award for Outstanding Campus Impact by a student organization. A campus-wide award ceremony was scheduled for April 11.