As we approached our proposal, the world looked a little different. Information was scarce, and we were envisioning creating a sort of central hub of arts-related COVID information, as well as online pedagogy. However, over the last couple of months, those resources have appeared in a variety of ways through much larger forums than our little working group could muster. This acknowledgement led us to reconsider what we could really bring out of this working group, and we arrived at the realization that, especially right now, **relationships are the key deliverable**. So rather than a finite resource, we have opted to create an ongoing resource in the form of a community.

For performing artists, collaboration and pedagogy are inseparable. And while our customary modes of collaboration have been hindered by the outbreak of COVID, the ingenuity that is also central to the performing arts is what will carry us through. Students we have spoken to are lamenting the loss of the big concert or the school play, longing for ways to create, for ensembles to be a part of, and for time and space to share with audiences. We believe that this community will, at least in part, fill this need in the interim, providing opportunities, support, and inspiration. But in the long term, we are investing in a strong community of ACS artists, fortifying us for the challenges and the triumphs ahead.

Jennifer Goff – Centre College – Facilitator
Peter Friedrich – Millsaps College
John Marshall – Sewanee, The University of the South
Jennifer Matthews – Sewanee, The University of the South
Laura Perkins – Rhodes College
Jason Rosenberg – Sewanee, The University of the South
Robert Seebacher – Centre College

The ACS Green Room

In the performing arts, the green room is a room backstage where performers and technicians and other people involved with the performance wait until it is their time to go onstage. In a world where taking the stage is currently on hold, we felt it apt to adopt this term for our inter-campus community, embracing the anticipation and potential inherent within.

In the 2020-2021 school year, Centre, Millsaps, Rhodes, and Sewanee will pilot this inter-campus collaboration program, launching tools, events, and other opportunities for collaboration and co-creation. We aim to build a framework for inter-campus, interdisciplinary work that will sustain us in this time of social distancing, but also lay a framework for relationships that will outlast the virus and enhance our students' and colleagues' creative and scholarly work in the future. In a sort of silver lining to the COVID cloud, the cancellation and postponement of most of our regular events has freed up time that we may not have normally had to devote to such an ambitious program.

We are building in active and passive routes to interaction with this community, from sites for creative collaboration and performance to more static lists of contacts, and information hubs. By creating a flexible set of experiences and tools, members of the ACS performing arts community will be able to engage to the degree to which they feel comfortable and motivated.

What we are proposing is unfinished by design, as we are creating a living community that will evolve as we learn about its potential.

Communication and Information

We have created two central hubs for information and interaction in The ACS Greenroom:

- Slack: Slack is a commonly used collaboration app that reaches out to our students where most of them already live: on their phones. But it can also be accessed via computer, for those who prefer to engage that way. The functionality of Slack allows us to create a dedicated workspace where students, faculty, and staff from any invited institution can interact freely. Within this workspace, we can create numerous channels where participants can self-select the kinds of conversations in which they want to participate. Playwriting, instrumental music, works in progress, modern dance, lesson plans, etc. are only a few of the limitless examples of ways that participants can shape their own interaction with the community. https://theacsgreenroom.slack.com

- Website: This website is intended to be a central clearing house of information for ACS programs who are interested in participating. This includes the link to join the Slack space, as well as a blog where representatives from each institution can post achievements, observations, lesson plans, calls for help, etc. The website in its current form is a shell that is still under construction, but will continue to be populated with relevant elements and tools as they are gathered moving forward. https://theacsgreenroom.wordpress.com/

The Pros

We will create a virtual speaker series, drawing on alumni and other contacts from ACS member institutions. This series aims to expose students to professional artists, helping them to think beyond their undergraduate experience to, to hear how the professional performing arts world functions, and how it is dealing with COVID.
- Though the specific speakers have yet to be invited and confirmed, we do have one locked in. For the 2020-2021 school year, The Harlem Quartet are artists-in-residence at Centre College, and will be available through that funding to speak to our group.
- If this element of The ACS Green Room continues and expands, we will likely apply for future funding through ACS to fund honoraria for the speakers.

Art-Making

The movement around the world to digital modes of performance opens up unprecedented opportunities for inter-campus collaboration. This is an element that will take shape over time as we both learn the technology and gauge student interest in different activities. So far, the ideas that we have assembled intentionally focus on process over product. It is the experience of imagining and making together, the value of creative problem solving and collaboration that these projects aim to celebrate, rather than the drive to make something polished or perfect. Our current ideas are:
- Digital ACS Cabaret – an "open mic night" of sorts, allowing actors, musicians, and performers of all stripes to showcase their work to peers on their own campuses and beyond.
- 48-hour play festival – already a staple on the Rhodes and Sewanee campuses, these popular festivals start writers with a prompt at the beginning of the weekend, and by the end of the weekend, a handful of short plays have been written, rehearsed and performed! We plan to include in the prompt explicit inclusion of musical elements, allowing interested musically minded students to be part of the creation of these new pieces.

- Improv Jams – digital improv performances, allowing troupes from different schools to face off in a little friendly competition.
- Zoomprov – a group of improvisers work through a series of structures in zoom, recording the scenes as they are performed. A transcript of the session is left in all its auto-generated transcript glory and handed over to a director and actors with no context, who then must rehearse and justify the scene exactly as written. Think of it like a complicated game of telephone.
- TikTok Challenge – we envision working with students to devise progressive TikTok challenges (dances, musical improvisation, movie scene recreations, sketch comedy, etc.) that will create a low-effort way for students to create and play together.

There are those who participate in the performing arts, but who are not performers, and there are opportunities for them to shine and benefit from these collaborations as well.

- Writing exchanges – playwrights and composers would engage in a sort of thread of creativity, writing short pieces and then passing them along to another writer or group of writers to continue working from where they left off, and then pass it off to the next, on down the line.
- Design/tech challenges – a creative task is set for a limited time period, and teams or individuals from each institution build, design, sew, paint, etc. in response to the creative prompt, leading to a showcase at the end of the time.
- Gallery – there is a blog space on our website that allows representatives from each institution to post files (images, sound, video, or whatever else they might come up with), in which they highlight finished work. The Gallery can also become a place for students who create asynchronous or pre-recorded performance pieces to share that work, as not everyone may have the technology available to participate in fully live-streamed performance events.

In addition to the specific activities, we are creating a centralized calendar that will house events (both collaborative and otherwise) from each member institution, keeping everyone in the loop about all performance opportunities.

<u>Faculty and Staff Resources</u>

Though we plan on only piloting the student engagement elements of The ACS Green Room with our four institutions at this time, we hope that we can spread a larger net for the Faculty and Staff resources from the beginning, inviting our ACS colleagues to become stronger resources for each other in this challenging time.

- On the website, we will aggregate general resources relevant to COVID and the performing arts (guidelines for reopening, technology and other guidelines for digital performance, tools for virtual classrooms). We will also provide information that is intended to foster relationships and collaboration between individual faculty and staff, creating a directory of performing arts faculty and staff at each ACS school, including specializations and research interests.
- We will solicit digital lesson plans and other resources from member faculty and staff, inviting them to share their own ideas and benefit from the ideas of colleagues from across the ACS.
- We will create an email list from this information as well, for those who are less inclined to jump into active participation in Slack, but still want to be informed.
- We will develop a guest artists (wanted and offered) database, to help connect people with those who would be willing to offer workshops across the ACS.
- We will reach out to ACS faculty throughout the year, interviewing them to have their work highlighted via profiles on the website.