

Dr. Kara Gardner
Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Director
Minerva Schools

Great Cognitive Tools: Training Leaders and Innovators for a Global Future

Our goal at Minerva is to take students with the highest potential and train them to become leaders, innovators, broad thinkers, and global citizens. To that end, we have designed a curriculum focused on “great cognitive tools,” rather than “great books.” In the 21st century, students have a vast amount of resources available to them. They need more than just an introduction to content at the university level – they need cognitive tools to help them process and make use of information. The Minerva curriculum provides students with “habits of mind” (mental skills that become automatic) and “foundational concepts” (knowledge that can be built on) that allow them to think critically, think creatively, and communicate effectively in any context. Students are introduced to these habits and concepts during our first-year cornerstone courses, and measured on their use and mastery of them throughout their four years. Students can apply these cognitive tools in a variety of diverse contexts, living in up to six cities around the globe from their sophomore to their senior years. They will graduate with a set of skills that are transferable to all kinds of professional contexts, and will have the tools to solve some of the world’s most difficult problems.

Short Bio

Kara Gardner earned her Ph.D. in music and humanities from Stanford University. As a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities, she taught for four years in Stanford’s Introduction to the Humanities Program. In addition, she designed and led classes on popular music, music of the Americas, music appreciation, and music and gender at the University of San Francisco for more than ten years. In 2008, she received a teaching award for innovative pedagogy and commitment to student learning from USF. She also taught writing-intensive seminars for graduate students at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Her book *Agnes de Mille: Telling Stories in Broadway Dance* is forthcoming from Oxford University Press. She joined the Minerva Schools at KGI in the fall of 2013, and currently serves as Academic Director in Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences.