How Fine Arts is connecting UT through Design
We are a college of “fine arts.”

What does that include? Music, drama, dance, painting, sculpture. But not all dance, art or music. Western classical or “art music,” but not Indian classical music. Modern “concert” dance, but not tap or hip-hop. Painting and sculpture, but not medical illustration or graphic novels. And not film, architecture or fashion design.

We’re clearly straining against the boundaries of what was confidently accepted as a “fine art” when the college was founded 80 years ago. Jazz, modern dance and design, though still small programs, now have a well-established place in the college.

We’re also as a college making a place for the commercial arts: gaming, design in all its many industry applications, integrated media and music and sound technologies.

We’ve forgotten that the concept of “fine art”—art as an elevated, aesthetic object—is an invention of 18th- and 19th-century Romantics. The concept forged a distinction between the visionary poet, painter and composer—“artists”—in contrast with orators, furniture makers, instrumentalists—artisans and entertainers.

Who are we today, and what should we be as a college? What art forms and activities should we include? What does it mean to be a “fine art” in the 21st century? Or is that now a distinction without a difference?

More importantly, what do our students need us to be for their benefit? What does our larger society and economy need from us as a public arts college? What can an arts college provide in a large, comprehensive university that other colleges won’t?

The College of Fine Arts has been, and will continue to be, the college of what’s great in the most refined tradition of Eurocentric “fine arts.” We have a vital preservationist role in studying the canonical works and artists of our culture and transmitting them to the next generation. We do this extremely well.

But we also are and must be the college of what’s next in both high and popular culture. What’s next in the high culture firmament often appears first as a fleeting youthful fashion or a calculated commercial venture or an obscure technical innovation. Most of these brief cultural lights flicker out in due course, but some—opera, photography and film, for example—permanently change our collective cultural identity.

There are no crystal balls to predict our cultural future. But we know for a certainty that brief cultural lights flicker out in due course, but some—opera, photography and film, for example—permanently change our collective cultural identity.

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NEWS

1. College launches two new minors and two new majors
The College of Fine Arts has added two new undergraduate majors and two new minors to enhance educational opportunities for students at The University of Texas at Austin.

Bachelor of Science in Arts and Entertainment Technologies
Arts and Entertainment Technologies (AET) is the first Bachelor of Science degree offered by the College of Fine Arts. This interdisciplinary major merges creative expression with technological innovation. AET foundational courses deliver creative coding fundamentals, an introduction to a wide range of production software and a colloquium series of guest speakers. Students advance to projects-based coursework drawn from three emphasis areas: Music and Sound, Game and Mobile Media Applications (GAMMA) and New Performance Technologies.

Bachelor of Arts in Design
The new B.A. in Design, which complements the existing B.F.A. in Design, is an excellent choice for students who prefer the flexibility and breadth of a liberal arts degree or who are interested in pursuing a simultaneous major in a complementary area. It also is more accommodating for transfer students.

Minor in Arts Management and Administration
The new minor in Arts Management and Administration introduces students to careers in for-profit and nonprofit arts enterprises, helps them develop skills critical for arts management across all disciplines and enables them to build career contacts through internship experience. The minor combines coursework from the College of Fine Arts and the McCombs School of Business.

Minor in Art History
The minor in Art History gives students interested in this field more flexibility to pursue art history studies as an interdisciplinary interest while completing majors in other fields.

2. Austin elementary school named after professor who founded UT photography program
An elementary school in Central Austin was recently renamed Russell Lee Elementary School to honor the famed photographer and founding professor of the photography program in what was then the Art Department in 1965.

Lee (1903–1986) was a social documentarian and artist best known for his documentary photography for the U.S. Farm Security Administration between 1936 and 1942. He worked for the U.S. Army’s Air Transport Command during World War II and later with the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Survey of Health and Mine Safety in the mid-1940s.

Lee moved to Austin in 1947 and continued to work for such clients as Standard Oil of New Jersey and the Texas Observer. He captured photos of many Texas luminaries, including John Henry Faulk, Ralph Taraborrelli, Creekmore Fath, Maury Maverick Jr. and Hart Stilwell.

In 1951, Lee was offered an appointment to the faculty of the Art Department, and over the next eight years, he developed the first photography program and taught hundreds of students. Lee’s archive resides at UT’s Briscoe Center for American History.

3. College working to implement strategic plan for diversity
The College of Fine Arts is in the process of implementing the goals and objectives laid out in the five-year strategic plan for diversity. College of Fine Arts Dean Doug Dempster formed a task force in 2012 to address issues of diversity in the college. After a two-year planning and research process, the committee shared its strategic plan for 2014–2019. As of spring 2016, the committee can report progress in the following areas:

- All faculty search committees now have one faculty member designated as a diversity advocate charged with ensuring a search surfaces a diverse pool of applicants.
- The college has partnered with the UT Division of Diversity and Community Engagement to offer workshops to all COFA teaching assistants on “Inclusive Classrooms.” The college hopes to expand the opportunity to interested faculty in the future.
- The committee has launched a Guest Artist Initiative that provides supplementary funding for visiting artists and scholars who might expand our understanding as a college community of under-represented cultures and viewpoints.
- The college has surveyed the availability of all-gender restrooms in our facilities and has added an additional all-gender facility in the Doty Fine Arts Building.
- All departments are establishing internal working groups, intersecting with the Fine Arts Diversity Committee, to review and establish guidelines and principles for diversity and inclusion within core academic curriculum and creative programming.

4. VAC receives NEA grant to support fall exhibition
The Visual Arts Center (VAC) has been awarded a $45,000 grant to support a multi-part exhibition by Mexico City-based artist Victor Pérez-Rul curated by Leslie Moody Castro (M.A., Art Education, 2010).

The VAC has partnered with UT’s Center for Latin American Visual Studies (CLAVIS) and Energy Institute, as well as the Mexican American Cultural Center for a project that explores the human consciousness of energy systems. In early fall, Pérez-Rul collaborated with participants in art, physics, engineering, architecture and design to create an installation that recycles solar power into kinetic and sonic energy to power an immersive and interactive environment within the VAC. In addition to the VAC installation, maquettes of the artist’s related work with solar-powered pods that emit sound and light at night are on exhibition on the outdoor plaza of Austin’s Mexican American Cultural Center. Both installations are on view through Dec. 10, and Moody Castro will be documenting the exhibition’s open lab and inventions with a catalog and website.
A 2014 study by the Design Management Institute reveals that over the last 10 years, design-led companies have maintained a significant stock market advantage, outperforming the S&P by an extraordinary 219 percent. Business leaders now recognize that designers can contribute a lot more than sharp graphics and aesthetically pleasing products. The research and creative methods that designers use, commonly called design thinking, offers a framework for teams from across many disciplines to solve complex, systematic problems.

As design claims a seat at the table in industries such as business, health care, computer science and customer service, the College of Fine Arts expects to double or triple enrollment in the Department of Art and Art History’s undergraduate design programs over the next three to five years. The Design Division has also expanded its non-major course offerings to introduce more UT students to both design thinking methodology and the fundamentals of visual design.

The design program’s expansion coincides with three new college initiatives that foster collaboration with partners across campus. The year-old Design Institute for Health, a joint venture with the Dell Medical School, is using design methodology to revolutionize the way health care is delivered. The newly launched Center for Integrated Design brings together faculty and administrators from seven colleges and programs at UT to foster opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning and collaboration through of design thinking. And a newly approved B.A. in design degree plan will allow more students to pursue a double-major in design to better prepare students for employment in a diverse and rapidly changing career field.

“Design to most people means an artifact,” said Doreen Lorenzo, who joined the college to lead the new center. “Today design has taken on a larger meaning. We are moving more toward the methodology—sometimes referred to as design thinking—that’s always been in the design world to create products, services and reinvent systems.”

Formerly the president of global design firms of Frog and Quirky, Lorenzo is bringing her renowned leadership and industry connections into academia. She said the hallmark of the program is bringing in industry professionals to meet with and teach students. This fall’s “Introduction to Design Thinking” course is taught by Frog’s executive director of design research, Jon Freach.

“We are working across all schools in the university to work together and collaborate to solve the problems,” she said, adding that the college is working to build a Bridging Disciplines Program certificate in integrated design open to all UT students. “Nobody is doing what we’re doing here on this scale. I believe we can change the dynamics of the industry because we have so many talented students here.”

To describe the changes in industry, Lorenzo’s former colleague Mark Rolston, who founded Austin-based ArgoDesign, uses an example found in most households—a clock radio.

In the past, a designer would create an object with knobs and a sleek user interface. In today’s design challenge, the clock radio is no longer a tabletop item, but a voice-controlled, invisible piece of technology, Rolston said. “The design problem has evolved from creating beautiful things to defining behavior and social engagement within a computing framework,” he said. “The problem is less about physical or visual design. It is now about engagement. It really complicates the challenge, but it’s also terribly exciting.”

Rolston spent years working with Lorenzo at Frog and said it is exciting to see someone so well-connected and respected in the industry join a university to help fill the gap between industry and higher education. When hiring designers fresh from graduation, he said he looks for people who can express their thinking through their work, as well as at least one useful talent that can be put to good use.

“For example, if a young designer can render beautiful screens or create smart wireframes, then they are more immediately useful. From that standpoint, they can learn to think strategically over time and begin to weigh in more deeply on the work. That’s where work ethic and humility come in,” he said. “Critical thinking and problem solving become priceless as they grow beyond those basic skills.”

Campus partners for the Center for Integrated Design:
- College of Fine Arts
- Cockrell School of Engineering
- McCombs School of Business
- School of Architecture
- School of Information
- Computer Science
The Design Institute for Health is taking design thinking into the complex realm of health care with the goal of designing each and every moment of patient-system interaction, said Lucas Artusi, a systems designer at the institute. The end goal is to apply human-centered design to every interaction from the moment a person makes an appointment through the duration of treatment.

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The ambulatory surgical center set to open late next year in the UT Health Transformation Building will not have a waiting room. Instead, Artusi said patients will check in and go directly to their room, and that is their room for the entirety of their stay. Not only can family members stay in the room while the patient is in surgery, but all clinical and administrative staff come to the patient. Other systems they are currently redesigning include reimbursement, nursing staff organization and delivery of specialty care.

“There are so many ways to create value and for the patient to be seen and heard and taken care of,” Artusi said. What excites him the most about this work is that the designers get to see it through. Typically, a design firm would present ideas and then a healthcare provider would choose from a variety of design “supportive classes,” said Carma Gorman, head of the design division. Students who are interested in ethnographic research can take anthropology classes; those looking to improve their data visualization skills can take statistics; those interested in designing apps can take courses in computer science or from the School of Information.

“The new menu of supportive courses gives students the flexibility to take classes in other departments that overlap with their interests in design. What’s especially great is that taking those courses means students learn to see problems from new disciplinary perspectives. They also get used to interpreting and using the specialized lingo used by people in different fields, which is great practice for professional life,” Gorman said.

Gorman expects students to graduate from the undergraduate programs not only with excellent “making” skills, but also with traditional liberal arts skills such as thinking critically, writing clearly, making persuasive pitches, doing solid research and communicating effectively with others.

Gorman is particularly pleased that both degree programs now make it feasible for design majors to study abroad.

“In living another part of the world for a few months gives you a really different perspective on the world, and on design, too,” Gorman said.
All in the Family

Dance program provides support, opportunity to students
By Alicia Dietrich

When Johnny Chatman II visited UT as a high school student, he was struck by how Associate Professor of Dance David Justin treated him during a tour of the Department of Theatre and Dance. “He just seemed more interested in me as a person than me as a dancer, and for me, at that time, that was important,” said Chatman (B.F.A., Dance, 2016). “One of the things I remember him saying was that ‘We’re a small program, but we’re a mighty program. We’re just a big family here.’”

The theme of family emerges often among members of the Dance program. It’s a relatively small program—about 75 students pursuing a B.F.A. in Dance—and an intimate place where everyone knows your name, classmates look out for one another and offer encouragement and professors nurture students into adulthood.

“I don’t know of another dance program that is as tight, as loving, as caring as we are. I believe that stems from the faculty’s love for us and the immense diversity of dancers we have here,” said Aminah Maddox (B.F.A., Dance, 2016).

Under the leadership of Associate Professor Charles O. Anderson, the Dance program has moved in new directions to attract more diverse students and guest artists and to expand the types of dance students are exposed to in their four years here. Anderson joined the faculty in 2011 as an associate professor of African Diasporic and Contemporary Dance and became head of the program in 2015.

Anderson oversees one of the most diverse programs in the College of Fine Arts—more than half of last year’s cohort were non-white students, and the faculty also has successfully worked to recruit more male dancers to the program by taking a page out of football’s playbook and heading out on the road to scout and recruit talent.

During Anderson’s time in the program, the faculty has worked to build on the classical traditions of ballet and contemporary dance by adding coursework in tap, jazz, hip-hop and even Gaga—an Israeli style of dance—alongside training in Gyrokinesis, release technique and yoga.

Professor Andrea Beckham oversees a robust Pilates program as part of the Somatics section of the curriculum that trains students in body knowledge and kinesiology. “The professional field itself is changing. It’s not enough for students to come out of college programs being good dancers,” said Tina Curran, clinical assistant professor. “They have to come out as good dancers, savvy about how to conduct themselves as entrepreneurs. And they have to come out savvy about how their art form is relevant and how they engage audiences.”

Curran, who joined the faculty the same year as Anderson, oversaw the launch of the Dance Studies Option in 2015 with Lyn Wiltshire, professor of Dance. Dance Studies students take the same classes as B.F.A. Dance majors—Performance Option, and they take additional courses in the College of Education to prepare them for teacher certification.

“To teach dance, one must first be skilled as a dancer,” Curran said. “At the undergraduate level, it’s important for students to fully develop themselves as dance artists. It’s really important both in our B.F.A. in Dance and for those students pursuing an education direction that first they’re artists, that they’re creators and that they’re artist citizens.”

Guest artists supplement classroom curriculum on technique, choreography, dance history and pedagogy. A-list visitors such as Sidra Bell, Manuel Vignouelle, Alex Kelley and Rennie Harris provide mentorship, set new work and offer guidance to students about how to succeed in the professional dance world. Anderson launched an emerging choreographer’s platform, the Vanguard Emerging Choreographer Residency, to attract this talent to UT.

“I think our professors really do try their hardest to make sure we’re getting all the experiences we need for post-grad life,” said Chatman. “Even in the college setting, I’ve had privilege to be in multiple works at UT, and I’ve been able to participate in many residencies to see how the real dance world works and how to transition my work while being a student at UT. The talent they’ve brought in past few years is astonishing, and I love seeing our program grow.”

Chatman took full advantage of the connections he made through the visiting guest artists, and he already had accepted invitations to join three dance companies when he graduated last spring—Johnnie Cruise Mercer and The RED ProjectNYC (run by Mercer), Christian Von Howard’s company, the Von Howard Project, and Charles Anderson’s own Austin-based company, dance theatre X. Chatman said he utilized his network through the program, and had time to digest and understand what it would take to support himself financially as a professional dancer. He modeled part-time while he was at UT to bring in extra income. And he took advantage of study abroad opportunities and traveled with Wiltshire to Austria, which he said gave him great perspective on what it’s like to live and work abroad as a dancer.

“I want them to realize that dance is this vast and varied field with a deep and diverse history and they are now a part of it.”

— Charles O. Anderson, Head of Dance program

Back row, left to right, Megan Rozauck, Kareni Nakaokou, Lianne Fazzetti and Heeman Koo. First row: Professor Charles O. Anderson, Zach ethanol and Lily Lane. The students were selected to perform at the American College Dance Association’s national festival in the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in June.
Music beyond the classroom

Students create opportunities through collaborative projects

By Rose L. Thayer

Within the walls of the Butler School of Music, students tuck themselves into practice rooms for hours perfecting their artistry, then come together for ensemble rehearsals and group performances. But somewhere amid all that hard work, communities form and ideas emerge. And while this traditional form of music education is valuable, something just as important is taking place — students are collaborating off campus to create, learn and perform in settings completely separate from their studies.

“They’re surrounded by this,” said Martha Hilley, 34-year faculty member of the music school. “And I think more and more of them are saying, ‘Hey, I see these groups. I see Eighth Blackbird. … Then they see all these people who are out making a way for themselves. I think they start saying to themselves, ‘Hey, if they can do it, why can’t we do it?’ Then you just have to have the guts to put yourself out there.”

Over the years Hilley said she has watched as “her kids” meet up and form these outside projects. She attends as many performances as she can at the Fast Forward Music Festival play to sold out crowds. In the past year, two new groups formed and launched waves for the creativity and excitement in their work — Tetractys, a mix of four alumni and current students, a new music concert series that commissions and performs new works by young and emerging composers. They planned to start their inaugural year with three performances, but closed their season in June after nine shows, said Chris Prosser, D.M.A. Composition student and co-director of the group. Added performances included a show at South by Southwest Music Festival and two collaborations with the Blanton Museum of Art.

“We are trying to create a community of people who want to be a part of new music and premiere new music and submissions of work,” he said. “I think we were more interested in contributing to the new music scene that already exists in Austin. Austin is a great town for doing what we want to do. It’s not oversaturated with new music.”

Many of the musicians and composers they hire are affiliated with the Butler school in some way.
Enterprises like these are not even outside school work—they are beyond school work," said Yevgeniy Sharlat, composition associate professor at the Butler school. "Those first few years after school are the most crucial and riskiest, because they are up against many other exceptional musicians," Sharlat said. "They are waiting for that moment when everything will just snap into place and people will call and ask them to participate in this and that." Prosser, of Tetractys, was Sharlat’s “right hand man” with CLUTCH last year.

New music ensemble Hear No Evil formed in April 2015 when Marley Eder (B.M., Music Performance, 2015) recruited a number of peers he collaborated with during his time at UT. One year later, co-director’s Eder and James Burch (D.M.A., Music, 2016) put on several shows per season showcasing music by local composers in addition to mainstays of modern ‘Pierrot’ repertoire. "UT was definitely the breeding ground of this," Eder said. "It’s so great to see all of this happening," Hilley said. "I think the students are really passionate about the possibilities of life beyond the hallowed halls."

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Oct. 6
Anton Nel and Christopher Guzman
Bates Recital Hall

Oct. 21, 23, 28 and 30
Butler Opera Center presents two operas by Giacomo Puccini: Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi
McCullough Theatre

Nov. 2-20
Little Women: The Broadway Musical
Book by Allan Knee
Music by Jason Howland
Lyrics by Mindi Dickstein
Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott

Nov. 9-20
Lost Girl
A new play by Kimberly Belflower (M.F.A., Playwriting candidate)

For more information visit finearts.utexas.edu/calendar

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1. Dance Reparatory Theater presents Bodies and Souls, Spring 2016 Photo by Lawrence Peart.
3. Commencement Spring 2016 Photo by Sandy Carson.
Haley Parsa, an undergraduate in Studio Art, received the 2016 Regents’ Outstanding Student Awards in Arts and Humanities. Only two students were selected across The University of Texas System. Both students were recognized in May at the UT System Board of Regents’ meeting.

You Are My Liver

“This originated from a reoccurring childhood memory of my grandmother that is carried out to this day. As she only speaks Farsi, almost everything she’s ever said has had to be translated to me. She would always say “you are my liver,” meaning “you are my life/I cannot live without you.” Not only was this phrase funny to me but it was always funny to think I feel completely connected to her even though we’ve never “spoken” — that I can still be in touch with my family, roots, heritage on a very intimate level despite not knowing Farsi or being “fully” Persian or being Persian “enough.” I have struggled to situate and understand my place in my family and myself as an Iranian American woman.

Aesthetically, the piece employs the same repeated letter technique used when learning a language on a fundamental, elementary level. Each letter of the Farsi alphabet is contained in an organic shape similar to bodily, liver like parts all composing one unit. The patterned rectangular shape and intricacy also remind me of the Persian rugs in my house I grew up around.”