

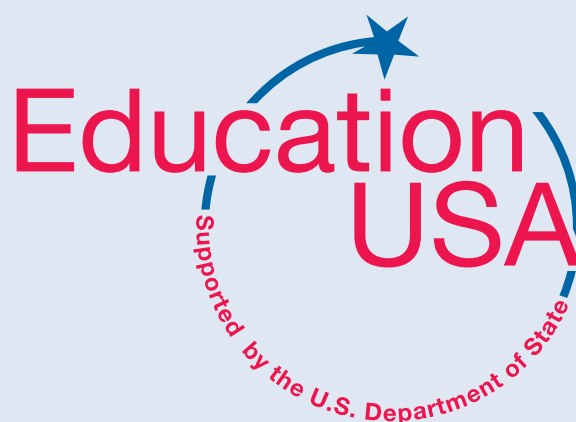
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CONNECTIONS

Issue Topic:

VOLUME 4: ISSUE 3

Studying the Arts in the USA



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In This Issue:

VOLUME 4: ISSUE 3: JULY 2010

Studying the Arts in the USA

Note from the Editor:

Artists tend to be the object of many stereotypes, not all of them positive. Fortunately for artists, not all of these stereotypes are true. The “starving artist,” laboring alone and unrecognized, is a rare breed today, when nearly every artistic field is supported by a vibrant and networked community, with education and training programs to match. Another common belief about artists is that their career paths may offer less security than other professions, and are rarely clear-cut and established. This stereotype is often true, especially in the current environment of rapid technological and economic change, but student interest in the arts remains as strong as ever. Because of this, aspiring artists need all the help they can get in selecting the right degree program to meet their personal, academic, and career goals.

The array of degree programs available to arts students in the U.S. is extensive, and Christine M. Giancatarino offers an overview of the options. *Connections* interviews Adam Rogers, Director of the Office of Admissions at the School of Visual Arts in New York, to get his take on hot fields in visual arts and what students should look for in a visual arts program. Jeannette Tien-Wei Law demystifies the process of selecting and applying for U.S. music programs, including how to approach the all-important on-campus audition.

This issue’s Arm Chair Tour features the EducationUSA center in La Paz, Bolivia, including an interview with Rosemary Romero. EducationUSA Marketing Coordinator Martin Bennett rounds out our three-part series on video conferencing with some tips on using the new EdUSA Connects meeting platform.

This issue is also accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Studying the Arts in the USA.” To find this PowerPoint and others, please visit the *Connections* section on the EducationUSA website.

It was great to connect with many of you at NAFSA in Kansas City. Your questions, comments, and requests help us improve *Connections* and make it more relevant to your center—so please don’t hesitate to share your thoughts.

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Studying the Arts in the United States: Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Options

By Christine Giancatarino

Feature

Pursuing a degree in the arts at a U.S. institution of higher education is a dynamic and powerful way for students to experience cultural exchange while expanding their artistic potential. The most common areas of study generally are dance, design, film, music, theater, and visual arts. These fields continue to evolve with the introduction of new technology and media forms. Students might wonder what kind of degree program is best for them, and might seek help deciphering a demanding application process. This article presents general information to help clarify the various degrees and application requirements in the arts at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE STUDY

Students who have completed high school and are interested in applying to undergraduate programs in the arts should first identify their area of interest. Though arts programs are becoming more interdisciplinary, it is imperative that students clearly identify their area of focus in order to produce a competitive application. This will also help advisers mentor students about which degree option might be best. There are three degree options that encompass most undergraduate studies in the arts: Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), and Bachelor of Music (BM).

Bachelor of Arts (BA)

The BA is a liberal arts degree awarded by many U.S. institutions of higher education. Students who choose to study an arts field within the context of a liberal arts curriculum will experience a program “designed for the student who desires significant breadth of experience and understanding rather than professional specialization” (“Drawing BA and BFA Emphasis,” 2009). This means that in addition to taking applied, practical coursework in their art specialization, they will also be required to take liberal arts classes to broaden their educational experience. Students who obtain BA degrees in the arts are often skilled in multiple disciplines, and many pursue careers or advanced studies in the arts and related fields. The BA degree is often awarded in the areas of dance, design, film, music, theater, and visual arts. For more information on the liberal arts, please refer to *EducationUSA Connections*, Vol. 2, Issue 2: *Liberal Arts Colleges*.

Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)

In slight contrast to the BA degree, the BFA degree is a “professional degree program which offers a conservatory approach to training” in the arts (“Bachelor of Fine Arts”). The “conservatory approach” is a specialized curriculum that requires students to focus entirely on their art. This means that most classes will focus on practical, applied training and very few classes will be required outside the subject area. Unlike the BA degree, the BFA is not part of a larger liberal arts curriculum. The aim of BFA degree programs is to prepare students for careers as artists or to prepare them for graduate study in their subject areas. The BFA degree is often awarded in the

fields of dance, design, film, theater, and visual arts. Occasionally, BFA degrees are awarded in music, but many schools award the BM instead.

Bachelor of Music (BM)

The BM is best suited for students interested in focusing specifically on music. The BM is considered a professional degree where the “curriculum is focused on teaching not only the performance side of music, but also practical and academic skills ... [preparing] the student for a professional career in music” (“Bachelor of Music,” 2010). Much like the BFA degree, very few classes are required outside the student’s music concentration. The BM degree is unique to fields related to music.

Notes on Applying

It is important to note that application procedures will vary from school to school. Generally speaking, undergraduate arts applicants should have strong high school grades, a well-written personal statement, and excellent letters of recommendation. All international students whose first language is not English will be required to submit IELTS or TOEFL scores, and most will be required to take the SAT I. In general, BA programs in the arts do not require auditions. Some BA programs will require students to submit a portfolio at the time of application, and many programs will require interviews.

Conversely, BFA and BM applicants will be required to submit portfolios, and in nearly all cases, an in-person audition will be mandatory in order to be considered for acceptance. In general, BA, BFA, and BM programs take four academic years to complete.

Did you know?

In academic year 2008/2009 34,854 international students studied Fine and Applied Arts, up 5.2 percent from the previous year, according to *Open Doors 2009*. Students studying Fine and Applied Arts make up 6.8 and 4.3 percent of the total international undergraduate and graduate population, respectively.

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GRADUATE DEGREE STUDY

Graduate study in the arts encompasses a wide range of fields with various degrees and specializations. The graduate application process is extremely competitive and very intense, and as a result it is important for international applicants to prepare applications well in advance of the deadlines. While not all graduate programs require an undergraduate degree in the same field, it is crucial that students have some recognizable experience in their intended field of study and be able to demonstrate their ability to conceptualize and produce work. Dancers and musicians must have significant years of training before entering a graduate program. Most design, film, theater, and visual arts students must have previous experience. A clear area of focus in a specific subject area is imperative for students applying for graduate programs in the arts. Graduate programs welcome applications from students with BA, BFA, and BM degrees.

Before applying to a graduate program, students must identify what kind of graduate degree they want to pursue, as there are significant differences among the degrees. If students are interested in academic, theoretical studies, they might be suited to the MA or PhD research degrees. However, if students are interested in applied, practical studies in which they will be creating work in their disciplines, they might be suited to the MM, MFA, or DMA degrees. The most common graduate degree options in the arts are: Master of Arts (MA), Master of Music (MM), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

Master of Arts (MA)

The MA is an advanced degree, usually two years in length. The curriculum will consist of coursework in a specialized field, and a final thesis is required. The MA is primarily available for academic, theoretical fields of study in the arts. Because it is a research-based degree, students will be producing papers as opposed to building performing and applied art pieces. Some examples of fields that award the MA degree are dance studies, film studies, theater history and theory, performance studies, musicology, and music theory. Many students who obtain the MA degree choose to further their studies by eventually obtaining the PhD degree.

Master of Music (MM)

The MM is an advanced degree in an area of applied music performance and composition. It usually takes two years to complete the degree. The curriculum will consist primarily of applied coursework in a student's area of study, with few theoretical classes to augment study. Students who are interested in working as professional musicians in the areas of performance, conducting, and composition will want to pursue the MM degree. Some students choose to further their studies by obtaining the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree.

Master of Fine Art (MFA)

The MFA is an advanced degree in an area of applied or performing arts. While program lengths vary, it is important to remember that most MFA programs take at least three years to complete. The MFA is considered a terminal degree; this means it is the highest degree awarded in an applied or performing art discipline. With the exception of the Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism program at the Yale School of Drama, the Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA) degree does not exist in graduate study in the United States. Instead, the MFA is the highest degree a student can obtain for applied study. Most students applying to graduate school in the arts will apply to MFA programs.

Interdisciplinary Fields in the Arts

With the broad spectrum of disciplines that fall under the auspices of "the arts," it is no surprise that the field lends itself to interdisciplinary study. The programs highlighted below represent a very small sampling of the hundreds of programs that put a unique spin on the "traditional" art fields:

Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM)

Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MASSART)

SIM is a place that generates the kinds of ideas with the potential to grow into entirely new art forms. The artists place their concept at the forefront of their artistic process—followed by a determination of the media and skills best suited for the realization of their ideas. This method nurtures artists that use many different methods to create - writing, research, animation, entrepreneurship, web authoring, performance art, programming, curatorial, robotics, event production, installation, sound, etc. as well as combinations among all these activities.

<http://sim.massart.edu>

Interactive Telecommunications Program

New York University (NYU)

ITP is a two-year graduate program located in the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU whose mission is to explore the imaginative use of communications technologies—how they might augment, improve, and bring delight and art into people's lives. The website describes the program as "a Center for the Recently Possible."

<http://itp.nyu.edu/itp>

Digital + Media

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)

Structured to promote thought and work that crosses traditional lines between disciplines, the Digital + Media curriculum challenges students to consider non-standard approaches to the computer as a creative and expressive medium. Study of technology, art and design is balanced with inquiry grounded in conceptual, critical, social, cultural and historical considerations.

www.risd.edu/digital_media.cfm

Program descriptions courtesy of the university websites

The degree curriculum consists primarily of applied practical work, with a few theoretical classes to augment study. Students will be required to create work during their years of study and to produce a final creative piece for their thesis. This degree is suited to students who would like to pursue a professional arts career or university teaching career. The MFA degree is awarded in most art fields; however, it is rarely awarded in music. Instead, students who intend to further their career as musicians or who want to teach at the university level in applied music fields will choose the DMA track. Student who are interested in working as actors, directors, dancers, choreographers, designers, visual artists, and filmmakers are suited to the MFA degree.

Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA)

The DMA degree is the highest degree awarded in the applied field of music. DMA programs usually take about five years to complete. The DMA is a terminal degree intended for musicians who wish to combine the highest attainments in their area of specialization with doctoral-level academic study in music. DMA students combine applied studies with theoretical research and write a thesis or dissertation. This doctorate degree is best suited to students pursuing an advanced music degree in the areas of performance, conducting, and composition.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The PhD is the highest degree awarded for the academic, theoretical fields of study in the arts. The PhD usually takes five to seven years to complete. Generally speaking, most PhD programs will focus on theoretical research with little to no applied work. The curriculum for programs includes coursework followed by exams and an original research dissertation. Students who receive PhDs in arts fields very often pursue university teaching careers. PhDs are awarded in academic theoretical areas such as dance studies, film studies, theater history and theory, performance studies, and musicology and music theory.

Notes on Applying

Just like undergraduate programs, the application requirements for graduate programs will vary from school to school. Students should have at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) in their undergraduate studies, a clear study objective, three solid letters of recommendation, and GRE scores. All international students whose first language is not English will be required to submit IELTS or TOEFL scores. Furthermore, most applications for graduate programs will require students to submit portfolios and creative work samples.

According to Columbia University School of the Arts, the “Faculty Admissions Committee considers an applicant’s professional promise, talent, background, and depth of commitment to his or her field...accordingly, the most critical part of the application is the creative materials which allow the committee to evaluate these considerations most clearly” (“Admissions FAQ”). These creative materials play a crucial part in the application process, especially for students applying to MM, MFA, and DMA programs. For PhD applicants, it is important to have strong writing samples and a solid academic background. PhD applicants should also identify a professor within the department in which they plan to work.

Because graduate arts programs are extremely competitive, it is imperative for students to submit all required portfolio materials and writing samples exactly as requested by the school. Each school will have its own unique guidelines, so students should visit the websites of desired programs in order to fully understand all requirements. Failure to follow guidelines and submit exact materials in the format and length demanded will likely result in a denial of admission. For some areas of study within the dance, music, and theater fields, an in-person audition may be required.

U.S. higher education institutions have a wonderful range of programs to suit the interests of students, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Having clear goals and a defined subject area is the best way for students to approach the application process. Embarking on a degree in the arts is both a demanding and rewarding experience, and international students are highly encouraged to apply.

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Interview: A Conversation with Adam Rogers

Feature

For an insider's perspective on international enrollment in U.S. visual arts programs, Connections interviewed Adam Rogers, Director of Admissions at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Adam Rogers is a committed educator and administrator and has traveled to over 35 countries promoting art and design education to international students. He is also a working artist who has exhibited extensively in New York, Chicago, and London. Rogers is most passionate about sculptural installation and holds an MFA from the Pratt Institute and a BFA from Illinois State University.

Connections: What are some of the recent trends, emerging fields, and hot programs in visual arts education?

Adam Rogers: There are several recent trends in visual arts education, but digital video is the most exciting. Digital video is the future of graphic design. Think graphic design that moves in time and space, and is accompanied by a sound track. This is "motion graphics" for communication designers. In motion graphics, students learn to experiment with a new form of design that allows them to shoot digital video, capture TV, design typography, create animation, and mix together a soundtrack—all in an effort to form videos with a graphic vision of their own. Motion graphics is not necessarily limited to designers. At the School of Visual Arts, students can study motion graphics as part of the Advertising; Graphic Design; and Computer Art, Computer Animation, and Visual Effects degree programs.

Connections: What distinguishes art education in the U.S. from art education in other parts of the world?

AR: Representing a school in Manhattan may skew my perspective, but arts education in the U.S. is a unique experience where artists can freely express themselves and be exposed to multiple cultural influences. This is especially true in New York City. The School of Visual Arts draws from so many diverse perspectives and multicultural influences. Students are exposed to over 1,000 arts professionals on our faculty and are accompanied by more than 800 fellow international students from over 45 different countries. Arguably, the U.S. and especially New York are the most cosmopolitan places on earth.

Connections: What factors should international students consider when applying to visual arts programs in the U.S.?

AR: All young artists want a program that encourages self-actualization and discovery of personal voice. This is certainly important, but a school that also focuses on training artists for their professional

lives can ensure that students will make a viable living in the arts.

The five major factors to consider when choosing an art college are: accreditation, faculty, facilities, curriculum, and location.



Adam Rogers, Director of Admissions
at School of Visual Arts

Most international students can understand accreditation as the U.S. equivalent of a school being certified by a ministry of education to grant degrees. Students should understand that by choosing an accredited college, they can ensure that other institutions will be likely to accept their credits in transfer and that the institution will meet high standards for faculty, curriculum, and educational substance.

Investigating faculty is an essential part of an applicant's college research. Does the intended college have enough faculty or is the student-to-faculty ratio high, meaning that the class sizes are large? Are the instructors practicing artists? In the competitive marketplace, to be successful in the art world, an individual must be "good," savvy, and connected. Does the faculty at a given institution have industry connections and make a living doing what the student hopes to do profes-

sionally? Or will students just learn theory and not be exposed to real-world experiences?

Although it may be difficult for an international student to visit a college campus in the United States, the facilities can be an important factor in choosing an institution. With the technological advances of the past 10 years, students must have access to the most up-to-date equipment. It is also important for students to learn software and work on "industry-standard" equipment. If a student's chosen profession predominantly uses certain software, the program of study should include relevant training.

International students should be sure that the college curriculum is sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs, but they also need to know that they will held to the same standards as local students. Visual art curricula that emphasize practical training, career devel-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



International students currently make up 18% of the SVA students enrolled in graduate, undergraduate and special programs.

opment, internships, and the business side of art will better prepare students for the real world.

The last key component to consider when searching for an art school is the location of the campus. As visual artists, students crave stimulating environments. A student should consider what a college's location has to offer; a location that supports a young artist's industry is very important. If students are able to network and create connections within an industry while still in school, they will be ahead of the competition.

Connections: *How do you think visual arts education will change in the next decade?*

AR: Visual arts education in the next decade will increasingly include online programming. A relatively new phenomenon is "low residency" programming. This means that students complete the majority of their degrees online, but are required to physically attend classes on campus for short periods of time, typically in the summer. This is a great opportunity for international students and career professionals who are unable to uproot and relocate to a new city or foreign country.

Connections: *How does a visual arts degree help international students after graduation?*

AR: Degrees from the United States are not only prestigious, but they also show employers that applicants can communicate visually and possess polished creative problem-solving skills. Most employers seek staff members that have multicultural exposure and can bring numerous solutions to any given situation. Students can develop all of these skills at an American college.

Connections: *What do admissions counselors look for when reviewing applications from international students for visual arts programs?*

AR: More than anything, admissions counselors look for potential. Obviously, for the visual arts, students need to possess not only creative potential, but also academic excellence. A student's portfolio should consist of their best work and represent the student as an

individual. When selecting pieces to include in a portfolio, students should think about which works distinguish them from the rest of the applicants.

Obviously, a high level of English proficiency is required for admissions. Believe it or not, the dreaded TOEFL or IELTS exam is not the main determining factor for most international students. Most colleges in the United States offer ESL programs and some colleges (like SVA) offer ESL studio programs. An ESL studio allows a student to earn credits toward a degree while studying English at the same time.

Visual Arts Resources

Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD)

AICAD is a consortium of 36 leading art schools in the United States. The AICAD website provides information for students and parents about studying art and design at the college level, including searching for art schools, art and design majors, degrees offered, careers in art and design, degree definitions, and applying for admission and financial aid. The 'profile sheets' available on the website make great handouts for advising centers.

<http://www.aicad.org>

National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)

NASAD is an association of approximately 300 schools of art and design, primarily at the collegiate level, but also including postsecondary non-degree-granting schools for the visual arts disciplines. NASAD is also the national accrediting agency for art and design and art and design-related disciplines. Advisers can do a 'simple search' on the NASAD website to find out if a school or program is accredited. <http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/> (click on Member Lists, scroll down to 'simple search'). The NASAD Directory, which lists accredited institutions and major degree programs, can also be purchased as a print edition for \$20 US.

National Portfolio Day Association (NPDA)

National Portfolio Day is an event specifically for visual artists and designers held at various dates and locations throughout the U.S. It is an opportunity for those who wish to pursue an education in the visual and related arts to meet with representatives from colleges accredited by NASAD. Representatives are available to review artwork, discuss their programs and answer questions about professional careers in art. All Portfolio Day events are free, open to the public and do not require pre-registration. For students with resource or EducationUSA advisers who are planning travel to the U.S., National Portfolio Days are a great opportunity to meet with representatives of multiple accredited art and design schools at one time. A schedule of National Portfolio Day event dates and locations is available on the NPDA website.

<http://www.portfolioday.net/>

These resources were compiled by Jennifer Russell, International Specialist at the College Board.