

The University of the Arts
Mission Statement Development—Student/Alum Session
October 30, 2018

Attendees:

- Erin Elman, *Dean, College of Critical & Professional Studies with a Center for Engagement*
- Shelton Walker, *Assistant Vice President for Special Projects Office of the President*

Introduction of Participants:

- Jake Brams – Graphic Design, Class of 2019 (Transfer Student)
- Reiko Copeland - Vocal, Class of 2019
- Nyah Duckworth – Dance, Class of 2020
- Aubrey Fink – Graphic Design, Class of 2019 (Transfer Student)
- Jenny Florinicia – Musical Theater, Class of 2015 (Alumni) - Now freelance/teaching artist
- Olivia Lane – Fine Arts, Sculpture, Class of 2020
- Majesty Royale – Dance, Class of 2019
- Christina Stefan – Industrial Design, Class of 2014 (Alumni)
- Victoria Waring – Film & Animation, Class of 2021
- Kailey Whitman – Illustration, Class of 2016 (Alumni) - Now works freelance

Discussion Points

Overview for Students and Alumni:

- Current mission statement is 20 years old and lengthy. An effective mission statement should be concise; should be around 12-20 words.
- When asked if students/alumni knew what our mission statement is some replied with “My place of choice”. However, this is more of branding statement. By a show of hands, about half the people in the room knew of this statement.
- In the process of creating a new mission, the team is holding conversations with different demographics of the school to understand their thoughts on the arts in society. They’ll use this input to help frame the mission and give pathways to arrive at goals.

-Timer was set for 20 minutes per topic-

1. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE WHERE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

Set up the topic: *Take a moment and go back to when you were evaluating where to go to school... and think about the process you went through... and, ultimately, the decision you had to make.*

Questions:

- For starters, what other schools were you thinking about?
- What were some of the primary considerations in choosing a school? Location, Major, Faculty, other?
- Why did you ultimately choose UArts?
- What surprised you—in good ways and not-so-good ways—once you got to UArts. Let’s start with the good ways...

“What about?” prompts:

- How much did the economics of a career and life in the arts play into your decision, if at all?
- How supportive were your parents during that process?
- Did you ever consider not going to college... or pursuing a different career path?

Student/alumni responses to 1st discussion point/questions:

- A number of students chose UArts because they were drawn to a particular school. Stories that reflect this are:
 - Student knew they wanted to go to the School of Dance after their dance teacher **recommended it** because their teacher practiced under Donna Faye. The School of Dance at UArts was a dream program for contemporary dance. The audition cultivated a space that allowed the student to share “all of the knowledge of their body and not just what was expected of them.” In the audition, **there was no ferociousness** – or ego. **It was inviting.** There seemed to be **no hierarchy** of dance or of art form.
 - Another student chose the School of Dance for similar reasons. They agreed there was “**no intensity of competition**” - unlike schools like NYU or CalArts. Instead it was **intense in form**; as in you had to be good at it.
 - Another student had already been in a performing arts school, so never really thought about going to college for the arts but they came to the audition based on a **recommendation** from a teacher. **Again, at the audition everyone was nice and inviting. No hierarchy**, even with seniors. They were so caught up with speaking to current UArts’ students, they missed their audition. When audition time was missed, everyone was really accommodating and student was still given the opportunity to audition.
 - At a student’s portfolio review it was the **first time they felt like someone understood their art**. The reviewer skipped all the polished and required parts and went to their personal projects. The reviewer told the student that they already have the raw ideas and they just need the equipment and that is what UArts can give them. It was the **only school that let her major in Film and Animation together**. It was also the **most affordable option**.
- Many students had a feeling of “I’m already here” after audition process or portfolio review.
- When students visited they said it felt like:
 - a place where stuff happens
 - lived in
 - there was paint on the walls
- A huge plus was not having to choose between majors. This allows students to be interdisciplinary artists. They can work with different media.
- UArts doesn’t feel pretentious.
- A number of students had gut reactions of “I feel good here”.
- A student from Baldwin Wallace University transferred to UArts because it was the only school that would allow her to start a Musical Theatre major as a sophomore. They recognized that she had all the fundamentals. Other schools were making her start again as a freshman even though she had already taken the required classes.
- Visiting UArts was very personal and 1:1.
- Another student transferred to UArts because they had friends who were going here and decided to come to the open house. They were **inspired by the work ethic and community vibe** that was presented at the open house.

- Lots of student talked about having a “gut feeling” about a specific school and just fell into the University.
- Students felt completely seen in portfolio review.
- Students/Alumni were prompted with a new question: Why did you choose an in person portfolio review over sending it in? Students replied:
 - There is a sense of security when you go to the portfolio review.
 - They can see your potential and accept portfolio on the spot.
 - Teacher prompted student to see the UArts table at a fair – there was a good relationship between their high school and UArts to the point where UArts recognized the school on student’s portfolio. Portfolio was accepted on the spot. (Graphic Design)
 - By going in person, the student was able to see first-hand that the reviewer understood what they were trying to do.

Before we move on to the next question, what are your general impressions of the major difference between an education at UArts and other major arts colleges and universities you were considering?

- **Financial Aid was a major factor** when deciding where to go. Student’s packages covered most of the tuition. UArts is more affordable than other art schools.

2. THE VALUE OF THE ARTS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Set up the topic: *Given the growing number of changes and challenges society faces—technological, economic, social, cultural and many more—it’s not uncommon for people to ask: “What’s the value of a degree in the arts in today’s world?”*

Questions:

- If a prospective student or parent asked you that question, what would you answer?
- How do you personally put a value on your education at The University of the Arts?

“What about?” prompts

- Are there any *advantages* to a degree in the arts that other traditional degree and career paths simply don’t offer?

Student/alumni responses to 2nd discussion point/questions:

- From a design perspective you can’t separate art and life. When it comes to design it’s integrated into every single thing we come in contact with on a daily basis. It’s naive for people to say it’s separate. Everything you touch relates to the arts.
- Art is inevitable. There is nothing you can do to stop art. It is a fundamental part of the human experience.
- Life imitates art; the art we create is going to shape our society. It’s irresponsible to believe it carries such great power and not want to use it to influence society positively.
- One student said – I make art in a selfish / non selfish way. I make art about my experiences, but experiences I hope people can relate to. Art creates space to affirm our ability and right to exists in our complex bodies with all the textures and sounds that we are. We need that in the world.
- Another student said – **Art has been my way to tell my story** or to get out of me things that normally wouldn’t get out in the hopes that others can connect to it. **Art has always been there in my life, like god.**

- Most of the students in the room are first generation artists – first in their family pursuing the arts.
- One student said – **Art is part of my voice**. Through this voice, hopefully others will relate to it and have the courage to speak up with their voice if they didn't before.
- Art is playful, so it allows people to say things they normally wouldn't.
- One student talked about Art Therapy. They expressed how so many people think they can't do art, but everyone is capable. It's just about having the agency. Art in a general sense is healing. It allows you to put your thoughts in another medium to get a different sense of what's going on.
 - Relating to narratives can help us heal
 - Holistic health – we are creators
- Art is stimulating just like philosophy and science.
- Students like the idea of **STEAM not STEM**. Puts A (ART) in the center. Art and Science are connected and it's a fundamental problem that they are separated.
- The question then shifts to creativity - WHAT IS THE VALUE OF CREATIVITY IN A CHANGING WORLD?
 - Is this the same question as “What is the value of *art* in a changing world?”. Or different?
 - Most students, if not all, agree it's different. For the following reasons:
 - One thing we'll always have as humans is empathy and art. Robots cannot take jobs that involve these things. Creative thought is one thing humans will always have over robots/AI/IT.
 - We're facing a lot of big problems, and thinking outside the box and having an art education allows for a completely different way of thinking about the world. Art education is fundamental in tackling the social issues we are facing today.
 - The inherent nature of creativity is that the person is being open minded enough to explore something they don't know the answer to – this is critical to human growth. Otherwise, you keep a narrow mindset.
 - Education that is based around creativity encourages you to fail and that is integral to human development

3. HOW DOES A UArTS DEGREE HELP YOU FOR LIFE AFTER SCHOOL?

Set up the topic: *Let's talk more specifically now about UArts...*

Questions:

- What specific skills and capabilities does UArts help students develop to have more successful lives and careers after school?
- What other skills and capabilities should UArts be helping students to develop to have more successful lives and careers after school?

“What about?” prompts:

- What about:
 - critical thinking
 - creativity
 - collaboration

Student/alumni responses to 3rd discussion point/questions:

- Business Fundamentals for Creative Economy (business class)
 - It's the most comforting and informative class that actually asks you to think about life after school. It's eye opening to have to sit down and look at a budget. It makes you look at things like what kind of job can you get / what jobs are in your field and how you can pay rent.
 - Gives you resources on how to find grants.
 - In this class you make sheets for two careers in your field (ex: freelance dance and opening up studio)
- Students expressed that working on their craft helps them to do what they want in their field, but that practical real world courses on how to get there also need to be accessible.
- In graphic design students are taught that they can wear most of the hats.
- In graphic design some of the newer jobs are not integrated into the curriculum.
- Animation is a hard field to get into in US because there's no funding. Animation doesn't have a lot of courses that talk about funding and resources.
- There was an overall feeling that students could benefit from more practical business classes. Specifically, business courses that relate back to what they want to do.
- Half of the room knows there are business classes, but find it hard to take advantage of them.
 - Note: Business minor has only been around for 3 years. (One student says there's still lots of work that needs to be done for the minor)
- Students were asked -What in UArts prepares you for life after graduation?
 - In theatre, nothing was super practical until senior year. Senior year includes a business of theatre class and an audition techniques class. It was hard to switch from art / method for 3 years to practicality in the last year. Student suggested that it might have been better if practicality was sprinkled throughout. Theatre students were also told that if there's anything else they can see themselves doing, to pursue that. They were not advised how to make important decisions that would help their career trajectory – ex. if they were successful and booking multiple jobs, how do they choose which one is better for their career.
 - As a whole, students expressed that more practical classes are crucial in the curriculum.
 - It was suggested that every student should have to take business class.
 - Ex: Being able to read / negotiate contracts is super important as a freelancer in order to protect yourself, but there's not a class offered that addresses this.
 - They expressed that they are going to college for their art form because they want to make a life doing it - it's a business. Otherwise, it's just a hobby.
 - One alum said their Human Factors Class (study of how people physically relate to their environment) in the industrial design school was basically what got her a job. This class was one element that was ahead of its time, but is not offered anymore. This class set her up professionally because it was strong in research, but that seems to be shifting now.
- Students/Alumni agree that it's problematic when art students say "Well, this is art school," in response to the rigor of academic courses. A number of students wish UArts was more academically challenging. They expressed that there tends to be a lot of academic handholding and that this is detrimental to students – it can make or break them getting a job.
- Students were asked: Do you think that this notion of the thinking artist is a societal issue or a UArts issue? Students responded:
 - Could be societal because of herd mentality – there's not critical thinking to back up artistry, but valuable art does it criticality.

- More rhetoric classes and mathematics classes would be great for the whole school of design.
- First year writing classes do not hold students to high standards, making it easy to float through the rest of the CS classes.
- Students do not feel challenged by the CS classes.
- Students expressed that they think more critically about classes that pertain to their major. Those classes are where they learn the “ability to language” or “to communicate”.
- Students express that generic 1st year writing or math courses are useless to the artist but express interest in having classes that are specific to the artist (ex: like resume writing or grant writing, or math classes focusing on budgets). This specific application of math and writing is what’s needed.
- Students express that it’s not productive for them to write about things they don’t care about in CS classes. However, they know there is value in learning and knowing proper language and writing skills.
- CS courses need to be applicable to goals and career.
- Student feel like they have a lack of foundation when curriculum keeps changing. They feel like they are missing classes that they should have taken.
- One student expressed that they enjoyed writing growing up but once they got to UArts there were less opportunities to write.
- There should be more cultural anthropology and multiculturalism classes – there are different and important conversations that happen in these classes
- One student LOVES CRIT classes. Favorite class. Student loves “Food, labor and art” and how it depicts power structures.
- Students reiterate that COURSES NEED TO BE APPLICABLE to them and their art.
 - “Goal should be to connect all courses back to art”

4. THE VALUE OF THE ARTS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Set up the topic: *A successful mission statement does more than just define a university; it becomes a blueprint for making decisions about the school’s future.*

Questions:

- What fundamental strengths of a UArts education do you want to see retained and reinforced going into the future?
- What does UArts need to change and improve going into the future?

Student/alumni responses to 4th discussion point/questions:

- The hope is for students to look at the mission and find themselves. The mission should represent students, and it should make UArts the place they want to go because they share the same core values.
- Students were asked what makes their education at UArts unique:
 - To be in an environment where art is the focus and is taken seriously.
 - The ability to dip hands into many pots, UArts is unique because it encourages you do your own “weird wacky” type of art. “A guitarist can also be a glassblower”. The university implies that you can do it all.
 - Having the entire university at your disposal – so many peer resources.
 - Departments pushing for each student to have their own voice.

- **Collaboration** is something that is really important and drives this school to be unique.
- **Location** is unique, we are not only set in a city but a city that is filled with art.

“What about?” prompts:

- 1) **Each student was asked to answer:** If you were the head of the university, what would your #1 priority be for the future of the school?
 - Jenny: Make sure the student to teacher ratio is conducive to learning and growth. Theatre department accepts too many freshmen. Faculty’s priority should be the student’s growth.
 - Olivia: Push the idea of collaboration more - maybe work on projects across colleges and disciplines.
 - Victoria: Push for student success right after graduations. (Ex. Hold industry fairs where students put up booths that advertise their art for potential employers and connections)
 - Majesty: Use funding to increase student diversity, making sure that students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to study art have the opportunity to.
 - Christina: Increase the rigor of work across the disciplines. Maybe more tough love is needed in programs or real-world advice. Realism doesn’t have to be cruel, it’s important. Less hand-holding.
 - Kailey: It’s valuable to have faculty working in the industry and it’s important to continue to have faculty work in the industry. It keeps everyone up to date on industry trends.
 - Nyah: Priority in diversity across the board – in faculty, courses, students, and the higher ups. Diversity would make the university unique.
 - Jake: A little more forward / future thinking in regards to curriculum.
 - Aubrey: Expand business courses and/or Corzo Center. Encourage students to apply for/research grants for personal projects.
- Students suggested that somehow blending the Corzo Center and business minor could be beneficial because:
 - Students would get more engagement with Corzo Center
 - It’s hard to make time for Corzo when it’s not in your curriculum. This would give students that time.

Next Steps:

- Keep Student/Alumni up to date on mission statement and accreditation process