

MEMORANDUM

To: USC Roski Community
From: Erica Muhl, Dean, USC Roski School of Art and Design
Date: July 29, 2017
Subject: Dean's Update on the USC Roski School

The Roski School is an artistic gem with a storied history, illustrious alumni, outstanding faculty, and bright, promising students. The past several years have comprised a period of tremendous forward movement for the school, and it has been my pleasure to work with all of you toward creating the academically and artistically rich institution that it is today. Building on the long-term stability provided by former dean Ruth Weisberg, and the rigorous academic foundations laid by former dean Rochelle Steiner, we have been able to bring the school into its own among the highly competitive and internationally significant art schools in Los Angeles – and therefore among the leading visual arts institutions in the country. We have not modeled ourselves on anyone else, nor have we sought in any way to match up to standards applied to art schools in the past. Instead, we have begun to forge an entirely new path for arts education, utilizing every advantage of this great university to prepare our students to drive change, to challenge others, and to make a better future for themselves and for the world. We have built and continue to build programs that embrace the history of art practice and theory, but also the unique culture of art as practiced in the western United States, and in Los Angeles – as only we, with Roski's own nearly 135-year history in the region, can. As we approach the beginning of another academic year, I would like to take this opportunity to review our progress as a whole and to highlight the many milestones we've achieved.

With the support of President Nikias and Provost Quick, beginning in 2014 the school embarked on an ambitious campaign to dramatically increase the ranks of its acclaimed senior faculty. Through the excellent work of Roski's faculty committees, the vice deans, our cherished staff, and USC's office of Faculty Affairs, since fall, 2015, we have welcomed seven internationally renowned artists to the school – Suzanne Lacy, Nao Bustamante, Edgar Arceneaux, Keith Mayerson, Patty Chang, Kori Newkirk, and Mary Kelly. The overall vision for the group hire included expanding our significant base in critical studies, as well, and the establishment of an art-school paradigm that would place top contemporary critical theorists and practicing artists shoulder-to-shoulder, in close collaboration. To lead this effort, in 2014 we welcomed one of the world's leading scholars on contemporary art, Dr. Amelia Jones. In fall, 2016, she was joined by the school's first tenure-track assistant professor hire in many years, Dr. Andy Campbell, whose work as a scholar is already bringing additional acclaim to Roski.

These hires were at the center of a larger initiative to provide a deeper and more permanent base of faculty experts that could drive continued and increasing excellence at the school, both in and out of the classroom. The initiative has been extremely successful, and has brought many distinguished artists, designers and scholars into Roski's full-time ranks in addition to those above. These include David Kelley, Thomas Mueller, Marisa Mandler, Karen Liebowitz, Alexis Zoto, Jeff Cain, Ewa Wojciak, Steve Child, Alice Fung, Osvaldo Trujillo, and Karen Moss, who will serve as Acting Vice Dean of Critical Studies during the 2017-18 academic year.



As a whole, the hires have added expertise in many areas that are of increasing importance to our students, such as multi-media, social practice, public art, performance art, and dimensional design. Importantly, they have also supported our continuing commitment to a traditional foundation by adding breadth and depth to core disciplines such as painting, drawing, video, sculpture, photography, and graphic design. They have also now brought the number of full-time faculty at Roski to its highest level ever, and evidence USC's and Roski's continuing support of tenure in the visual arts, and our efforts to build a thriving and empowered full-time Research, Teaching, Practice, and Clinical (RTPC) professoriate.

The data give an even clearer picture of the Roski School's remarkable success in this area, and the resultant benefits to students and faculty. Since 2013, numbers of tenured and tenure-track faculty have risen by 18%, and now comprise an impressive 42% of the school's full-time faculty. Increases in full-time teaching and practice faculty have risen by 80%, including a significant number of faculty promoted to full-time from Roski's highly valued adjunct ranks. I'm most proud to report that, since 2013, floors for full-time faculty salaries have increased by 27%, and for part-time faculty salaries by nearly 70%, rivaling or topping any leading arts school in the country. This commitment to supporting our faculty is further contributing to the articulation and implementation of the vision of the school, and encouraging all faculty to have a voice and to be engaged in our progress.

In an effort to broaden mentorship and support for interdisciplinary student projects, and to increase opportunities for innovative research among our own faculty, we have also continued to work to establish important joint faculty appointments, most recently with the appointments of Dr. Meiling Cheng from the School of Dramatic Arts, and Dr. Suzanne Hudson from the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. The faculty overall is more diverse, as well, providing a learning environment that is socially and intellectually rich and inclusive.

Our existing graduate programs, the Master of Fine Arts and Master of Arts in Curatorial Practices and the Public Sphere are thriving, with full complements of highly accomplished students in advanced art and curatorial practice. In addition to the intensive studio- and practicum-based experiences, the programs as redesigned now offer robust opportunities in complementary fields of study, supporting a broad range of practice and research specializations that cross many other schools and programs at USC.

One of our biggest achievements to date is in the graduate area. I'm excited to announce that the Roski School's first new graduate program in many years, the MFA in Design, will begin recruiting its first class this fall for a start in fall, 2018. This new program will be based on the philosophical and pedagogical platforms that have educated and mentored Roski's many successful graduates who hold top positions in the creative industries here and abroad, while driving new directions and new ideas in the discipline. Supported by a generous gift from the Del Mar Schnabel Foundation, the MFA in Design will also expand USC Roski's physical presence in Los Angeles, with new studio and classroom facilities planned for the burgeoning Arts District.

To support our graduate students, gifts to the school in recent years have augmented Roski's already substantial merit aid funding, providing additional fellowships and awards to incoming and continuing students. Just this past spring, the school received a \$1.3 million gift that will endow the MFA program with a full-ride fellowship, providing full tuition and a living stipend. Teaching and newly funded research assistantships continue to provide tuition, stipends, and critical in-class experience for highly qualified MA and MFA students. Other unique funding opportunities include the International Artist Fellowship, which provides full-ride support for one MFA recruit each year, and a recently created post-graduate teaching fellowship, which offers a subsidized faculty appointment, studio space, and continued mentorship from faculty.

In 2014, Roski's Faculty Council was asked to oversee the review and revision of the undergraduate curricula. Through the hard work of multiple faculty committees, the Faculty Council, and the faculty body as a whole, the school has crafted a dynamic and demanding new curriculum that will launch this fall. Renewed and revitalized BA degrees in both art and design maintain the school's strong studio model while allowing students to more easily craft cross-media and cross-disciplinary practices both within Roski and across USC. As a complement to this, the BFA, Roski's signature undergraduate program, focuses even more exclusively on rigorous studio practice in art and design, offering select students the opportunity to work under close faculty mentorship toward a practice of their choosing. In both degrees, theme-based, interdisciplinary and multi-media studio classes will now complement traditional art and design intensives, providing students the opportunity to obtain an exceptional arts education free of mandated disciplinary tracks.

A number of these innovations have already been implemented into the curriculum in anticipation of the launch of the full curricular revision this fall. It is exciting to note that, in response, Roski's undergraduate programs are enrolling record numbers of exceptional students from around the globe, students who seek to take advantage of the school's quality of education and one of the most forward thinking and adaptive curricular models anywhere. Applications have risen steadily during the past five years, with an overall increase in application numbers by 26%, and an overall increase in enrolled students by nearly 20% in just the last three years. An exciting new critical studies curriculum is drawing huge numbers of minors and non-majors from across USC, as well, and providing an essential foundation in global visual culture that is increasingly relevant to virtually every pursuit.

Of course, supporting these gifted undergraduates is critical. New gifts to endow undergraduate scholarships have increased merit aid by a staggering 66%, allowing the school to support increased numbers of BA and BFA students. New endowments for student prizes provide funds for materials, equipment, travel, and other resources. Students are also benefitting from nearly three quarters of a million dollars in facilities upgrades undertaken since 2012, all funded by generous gifts to the school. These include the upgrades to studios and labs in Painting, Advanced Photography, Intermedia and Design; a new video editing suite for the graduate facility; creation of the school's first 3D Print Lab; renovation of the Galen Print Lab; and the establishment of the Del Mar Schnabel Design Lab.

I'm tremendously proud of all we have accomplished together. Our students are already profiting from the deep investment in the growth and increasing diversity of the faculty body, new programs, student aid, facilities, and pre- and post-graduation opportunities. We have built an environment in which intensive attention is paid to the individual student, and the priority is on honing specific skills while working easily across boundaries when creative needs require. Appropriate to our setting in a major comprehensive university, ours is now a model where research, teaching and practice inform and ignite each other, and design, art, and critical thinking provide a broad understanding of how these visually oriented practices and studies interrelate in the twenty-first century. We have greatly increased our engagement with our neighbors, and have embraced anew the energies of Los Angeles – one of the most vital sites of contemporary art and design practice in the world – through strong partnerships and participation with USC's Visions and Voices and Artists Transforming Society initiatives, with The Getty, The Broad, The Main, California African American Museum, and many others. And we will continue to play an increasing role in moving forward the interests of our community, and in serving as a center for the support, study and practice of the art of our region, and beyond.