

Report of the President of the School

When I was first appointed President of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010, it was on an interim basis. However, what began as a temporary position quickly grew into one of the most enjoyable chapters of my career. As a physicist, leading a school of art and design has certainly been a learning experience, but as Nobel laureate Richard Feynman once wrote: “In order to make progress, one must leave the door to the unknown ajar.” It has been an absolute pleasure to explore the arts and design here while also helping one of Chicago’s most important cultural institutions prepare for the next phase of its history.

At 150 years old, I believe SAIC is in its strongest position yet. This strength is the result of the team of individuals we have assembled at the School, the professionals whose commitment to the arts, design, education, and the city of Chicago has been an inspiration every day during my tenure. Although this will be my final semester in the presidency—current Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Elissa Tenny will succeed me on July 1, 2016, while I will transition to the new role of Chancellor for an additional two years—I know that the School’s future is bright. Together we have accomplished a great deal, and though it is difficult to encapsulate six years of hard work, as I look back on my tenure some general themes begin to emerge.

Academics

The past six years have seen SAIC take a number of important steps toward strengthening our already formidable academic offerings. The School remains consistently ranked at the top of our peer institutions in terms of academic quality, yet we also continue to innovate and identify new ways of ensuring our students receive the best art and design education possible. For example we implemented our new “academic spine,” a curricular roadmap to help guide our undergraduate students through their studies and the School’s interdisciplinary, open structure. Other areas of focus have included fortifying student advising services, restructuring the Career + Co-op Center, and developing new programs such as our Low-Residency MFA. Given my background in the sciences, I have also emphasized furthering opportunities for inter-institutional research and collaboration, particularly as it concerns artists, designers, and scientists working with one another. I am proud to say that in recent years we have begun partnerships with leading research institutions including Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, in addition to several other projects and initiatives by our faculty, through the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Center for Research and Collaboration.

Campus Planning

Art and design education is an ever-evolving field and the School must be equipped to respond to the changing needs of its community in both the short and long term. To ensure that our campus meets the demands of art and design practice in the twenty-first century, we have developed and completed a comprehensive Campus Master Plan to identify our future campus needs for space, equipment, technology, and related support services in the next ten to twenty years. Based on the plan’s recommendations, in 2014 we acquired a 56,000-square-foot plot of land at 609 South State Street. This land acquisition was budget neutral and provides us with the flexibility to develop a custom building in the future. We also modernized the campus in other respects, particularly through the addition of our first campus center: the LeRoy Neiman Center, a café and programming/event space occupying the first two floors of the Sharp Building. The Neiman Center provides our entire community with a dynamic space in which to study, exhibit, create, and congregate.

Diversity

Diversity is a critical issue throughout all of higher education and for art and design schools in particular. As a result, throughout the past six years, the School has pursued a coordinated and holistic approach to building diversity and supporting inclusivity on our campus through the efforts of our Diversity Advisory Group. Their work has led to new academic and administrative positions, including the appointment of Christina Gomez as our Director of Academic Affairs for Diversity and Inclusion and Rashayla Marie Brown as our Director of Student Affairs for Diversity and Inclusion; curricular initiatives such as “Moments of Inclusion,” a series of workshops aimed at giving faculty more pedagogical tools to conduct constructive conversations around diversity and inclusion in the classroom; several

programs to broaden the School's outreach to underrepresented communities, including our new partnership with the Foundation for Homan Square; and a number of special events and symposia this past fall, including "Intersectionality Month" and our first-ever Diversity Advisory Group Symposium, "Reframing Visibility," which featured speakers Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Mariam Ghani.

International students make up thirty percent of our student body and contribute widely to the educational experience at SAIC by bringing diverse cultural perspectives to our classrooms and studios. We are also deepening our engagement with the local community in Chicago through programs such as our College Arts Access Program, a college-bridge program that prepares students from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) for admission to SAIC or similar institutions, and the Walter & Shirley Massey Chicago Fund, which provides scholarship funds to SAIC students who are also CPS graduates. In recognition of these continuing efforts, the School has received the *INSIGHT Into Diversity* Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award the past two years.

Financial Health

Our 150th anniversary year finds SAIC in a position of financial strength. Through FY15, revenue and the endowment have reached ten-year highs and debt a ten-year low. Applications, enrollment, and selectivity have also reached ten-year highs, a reflection of the lasting and growing prestige of the School and its faculty as well as the professionalism of our admissions staff. The past year alone saw record enrollment as well as excellent fundraising, financial, and operating results. Additionally, this year the School reduced the number of credit hours required for graduation, which in turn will reduce the cost of an undergraduate degree at SAIC by five percent.

Fundraising Capability

For the first time in its 150-year history, SAIC is able to conduct a major, independent fundraising campaign. This new capability is an outgrowth of our strategic plan and has already resulted in the establishment of our Office of Institutional Advancement in 2010. Accordingly, under the guidance of the Art Institute of Chicago's Board of Trustees and SAIC's Board of Governors, we have launched *Beautiful/Work*, our first-ever campaign in support of students and faculty. We have already received a number of generous gifts toward student scholarships and faculty initiatives throughout the campaign's leadership phase and anticipate a successful public launch on May 6, 2016, in concert with our 150th Anniversary Gala.

Organizational Effectiveness

Under the leadership of Provost Tenny and the Organizational Effectiveness Action Group, we have vastly improved the overall organization of the School. Our efforts have included the development of new infrastructure, processes, and systems in technology, business intelligence, finance, and human resources. Two initiatives stand out in particular: first, the fortification of our academic administration and second, the creation of our Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA). In the case of the former, this effort necessitated restructuring a number of academic and administrative roles, creating more efficient structures and processes for the Faculty Senate, and streamlining enrollment/course registration procedures. In the case of the latter, OIA has combined into one department the functional areas of development, alumni, communications, and marketing, creating new efficiencies and capabilities throughout the organization.

It has been a productive six years here at SAIC. As a longtime Chicago resident, I know how critical this institution is to the cultural life and fabric of our city. I first arrived in Chicago in 1966, during the heyday of the Chicago Imagists. Although I was mostly immersed in the world of theoretical physics at the time, I was nevertheless aware of the waves that SAIC alumni like Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt were making with their exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center—and how their work helped put the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and its home city at the center of the art world. Little could I have imagined that years later I would join SAIC as its president and have the opportunity to partner with so many talented artists, designers, and scholars. As we celebrate the School's 150th anniversary year, I believe this community is well-positioned to continue leading and innovating in the arts and design world for the next 150 years. I look forward to seeing what the School and its community achieve next.

Walter E. Massey
President
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago