

The Advocate
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Letter: Performing arts touch, inspire

The Advocate's editorial (April 9) about the Swine Palace and the LSU Department of Theatre's dedication to social justice and consciousness-raising acknowledges the power of the performing arts to touch, move and inspire.

In difficult economic times, applications to the undergraduate theater program at LSU are way up. Does this mean that students are flocking to the stage with dreams of professional careers in acting, design or production? To an extent, certainly. But it is becoming clear that performing arts training can prepare students for lifelong success in many ways and in many fields.

Perhaps this increase in theater applications is reflected in the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, an annual online survey projected to reveal the impact of arts-school education. LSU is a charter member of the group. SNAAP is part of Indiana University's prestigious Center for Postsecondary Research in collaboration with the Vanderbilt University Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy.

The SNAAP survey of more than 13,000 arts alumni showed that higher wages don't always predict general happiness, arts alumni are (mostly) gainfully employed, enjoy satisfying careers and, if given the chance, would follow the same path in studying the arts. Of those, 73 percent say they are satisfied with the opportunity to work in areas that reflect their interests, passions and personalities.

Contrary to what is widely believed, unemployment among arts graduates is well below the national average. According to the survey, it's only around 6 percent.

At LSU, the College of Engineering and College of Music & Dramatic Arts are collaborating to assure that our graduates can think, speak, write, design and employ technology to become creative citizens and successful innovators.

Creativity expert Eric Booth and Elizabeth Long Lingo, of Vanderbilt University's Curb Center, will visit LSU next month to work with faculty, and Booth will speak to the Baton Rouge Rotary Club on May 16. The College of Education, College of Art & Design and CMDA are exploring an initiative by Chancellor Michael Martin to employ integrated arts education (a program called A+ Schools) to improve K-12 education across the state of Louisiana. Theater and biological sciences professors are co-producing a new "SciArt Conversation Series" that pairs scientists and artists on stage for informal presentations of their work. The present and past deans of the College of the Coast and Environment are both on the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra board of directors. The CMDA is working with the Manship School of Mass Communication to launch LSU's entrance into Apple's iTunes U, and is in the second year of the Janice H. Pellar Creative Arts Entrepreneurship Project.

The broad impact of the performing arts at LSU touches many lives in many ways.

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