WISCONSIN'S FIRST UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MILWAUKEE SCHOOL
OF FINE ARTS: ITS FIRST TWELVE YEARS

Adolph A. Suppan
University Wisconsin—
Milwaukee

In December 1962, the University of Wisconsin Regents established the state's first university school of the arts, at The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This is an account of the creation of that School, its academic innovations, and its first twelve years of development.

It will be evident from what follows that a potent stimulus toward the possibility of such a school came when the University began its artist-in-residence program during the 1960 summer session.¹ On campus were poet John Ciardi, abstract-expressionist painter Jack Tworkov, composer Alvin Etler, the Fine Arts Quartet, the New York Woodwind Quintet, and pianist Frank Glazer. The program (subsequently given the inclusive title of “Summer Arts Festival”) was unique, at that time, in several respects. The artists came not for a one-day visit, but to teach courses, lecture or perform, and hold conversations with students, faculty, and public. In round-table discussions between visiting artists and the faculty, the arts were examined in relation to one another under such topics as: “The Artist and the Critic,” “Government Subsidy for the Arts,” “The Artist and the Public: A Communications Gap?,” and “The Artist in the University.” At concert “previews” and lecture-demonstrations, Mozart and Beethoven, as well as Bartok and Schönberg, were explained and discussed. A spirit of aesthetic excitement prevailed for many weeks, as the audiences realized that the arts together had more impact than the arts individually.

The success of this, and the 1961 summer program relating the arts in teaching and performance, soon posed an obvious question for the University. Why should the arts come together only during the summer session?

Early in 1962, Chancellor J. Martin Klotsche created the Ad Hoc UWM Committee to Consider the Future of The Arts. The Committee, representing a broad range of the arts and art related administrators, included Professors Lester E. Fuhrmann
(Theatre), Frank M. Himmelmann (Education), Frederick I. Olson (Extension), Milton H. Rusch (Music), Robert Schellin (Art), and Adolph A. Suppan, Chairman (Director, Summer Session).

This committee wrote a document which, for those years, displayed significant foresight relating to the situation of the arts in most of the nation’s universities. The essential recommendations were:

**PROPOSAL FOR A UNIFIED FINE ARTS PROGRAM AT UWM**

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To provide a continuous and effective relationship between UWM departments related to the fine arts area
2. To enable these departments to coordinate their resources; to encourage generally in the university a recognition of the value of the disciplines inherent in the arts; and to intensify departmental offerings in the fine arts to both the students and the community
3. To make it possible for students to major in a fine arts curriculum which cuts across departmental boundaries; permits students to see the arts in their natural relationship to one another; and allows concentration upon such areas as aesthetics, arts history, cultural development, and art in society
4. To permit within the professional training of each student majoring in the arts a maximum intensity of study and experience in his area
5. To centralize lines of communication between the total university arts program and civic organizations working in the arts
6. To coordinate programs in the arts (music, theatre, the dance, and the visual arts) so that each year a calendar of arts activities can be printed in advance, providing the community with a total awareness of the varied activities and wide range of the arts in UWM.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The university should establish a separate division of fine arts with an administrative head directly responsible to the Provost [now Chancellor]. This division would include the departments of art, art history, theatre, music, and the dance. The present budgets of these departments (or what are now areas within departments, such as theatre and dance) would be incorporated into the total budget of the division.
2. The fine arts unit would include among its primary functions the objectives given above, and would implement them as soon as is possible.

The recommendations, approved by Chancellor Klotsche and the relevant departments and deans, were submitted to the University of Wisconsin administration in Madison. Action on the document came in the fall of 1962 when the new president of the University,
Fred Harvey Harrington, also approved it and relayed it to the University Regents. In December 1962, the Regents created a School of Fine Arts for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and appointed Adolph A. Suppan as its first dean.²

Intense planning by faculty and administration began; only eight months remained before the new School was to open. The deans and faculties involved had to consider the mechanics of bringing existing departments and new academic areas together. Dean Joseph G. Baier of the College of Letters and Science played an important role in effecting a smooth transition for Music (already a department) and Theatre Arts (three faculty members in the Speech Department). At the School of Education, the Art Department (like Music, already possessed of an excellent reputation in the state) was also involved in the move. The existing dance courses were offered by the Department of Women’s Physical Education; that department preferred to retain the one faculty member involved and, therefore, an entirely new dance faculty had to be appointed.

A Faculty Planning Committee was formed to design a general curriculum for the new School—admission details, course requirements, and revised departmental programs. The Committee’s recommendations were resourceful and innovative. Besides the four departmental programs—Art, Dance, Music, and Theatre Arts³—a fifth unique program was added: Inter-Arts. A student choosing to become a generalist in the arts could get a degree by working in any three of the four departments; e.g., 24-credit with “mini-majors” in Music, Theatre Arts, and Dance. This degree could form a background for fields such as arts administration, arts history, concert hall management, or arts journalism.

A second feature of the proposed new curriculum was a requirement that every student, no matter which of the five new majors he or she chose, should take two year-long survey courses: Arts and Mankind in the freshman year and The Arts: Theory and Criticism in the senior year. These wide-ranging courses, taught by a team of instructors from the entire arts faculty, would, in the first year of the students’ academic experience, acclimate them to art disciplines other than their own and, in the fourth year, give them an overall view of critical principles and practices relating to all the arts, and thus broaden their aesthetic approaches. These classes would, we hoped, liberate the students from the too-concentrated, conventional arts major. As far as we knew, such courses were not offered in any other institution.
The Committee also was aware of current criticism that many private conservatory programs in music, art, theatre or dance neglected the students' liberal arts education. The new curriculum required 30 credits in the humanities and sciences, without sacrificing an adequate credit load in the major discipline.

In summary, the Committee proposed an arts education of rigorous professional competence, yet eschewed over-specialization by creating a balance with general education and an introduction to the other arts.

The labors of the Committee (its members always in consultation with colleagues in their various departments) were rewarded when, on March 28, 1963, the arts faculty approved the new curriculum. On April 11, the all-University faculty gave a unanimous go-ahead to the new School. Similar approval of the new curriculum by the University administration and Regents quickly followed. In a few months, the first university college of the arts in Wisconsin was ready to face its next challenge: its reception by students and the public.

First-semester registration, in September 1963, exceeded predictions. Enrollment in arts majors increased from 1,011 to 1,248—23 percent overall. Class registration rose from 6,798 to 7,579—12 percent, compared with an all University increase of 9 percent.

During that first year and the next, these developments in the academic progress of the School took place:

(1) Recognition of the Music Department by the two leading national accreditation systems: the National Association of Schools of Music and the National Council for Teacher Accreditation. These were significant not only for their stamp of approval for an already reputable department, but because there had been some faculty concern that the department might lose stature by joining an arts school with a new curriculum.

(2) The appointment of the internationally-famous Fine Arts Quartet to full-time faculty status with tenure. There were some resident quartets in other universities but, to our knowledge, none had ever been given tenure as a group. The acknowledged excellence of the Quartet also signalled to the community the standard of quality the new School would strive for in its appointments.

(3) New graduate programs in Art and Music: three Master of Music degrees (Applied Music, Conducting, Music History and Literature); a Master of Fine Arts degree, offered parallel to the existing degrees of Master of Science in Art, and Master of Science in Art Education.
(4) A four-year curriculum and an Education major in Theatre Arts.
(5) A four-year professional major program in the new Department of Dance.
(6) Revision of the Art Department’s undergraduate program, with eight professional areas of specialization.

During subsequent years (1965-67) enrollment increase continued, exceeding all-University averages; the full-time faculty had now increased from 44 to 70. And, because of the burgeoning student population, a desperate need for additional classroom and office space developed. Only the Music Department was adequately housed; it had acquired, a few years before the formation of the School of Fine Arts, an efficient new building with an excellent recital hall. The Art Department was still in cramped quarters at the north end of old Mitchell Hall’s third floor; dance and theatre classes were also scheduled in that building; music, theatre, and dance performances took place in Mitchell’s “auditorium,” originally designed for lectures and debates. It had a cramped stage which served only minimally for theatre purposes; also rows of uncomfortable, joined, wooden seats were movable, to make room for campus dances. The new School, with its many students, was suffering one of the most ancient of institutional diseases—lack of space.

In the fall of 1966, Chancellor Klotsche announced the welcome news that the Regents had approved a new Fine Arts Center for the University. A Faculty Planning Committee was immediately appointed to advise the state architects and engineers on the three-building complex (to adjoin the existent Music Building). We wanted a plan that would include classrooms, offices, studios, galleries, student recreation space, and a multi-purpose theatre. Though we wanted a center that would offer adequate performance and exhibition space, we hoped it could also be an appropriate environment for the artist/teachers and their students.

As indicated before, the School had a two-fold academic purpose: to provide professional and general training in the arts, and at the same time to alert students to the inter-relationship of the arts. We therefore asked the architects to design a quadrangle which would coordinate the arts in a spatial, as well as academic, continuum. They accomplished this with an inter-flow between the units, using covered walks and adjoining courtyards; provision was also made for a number of arts activities in each of the buildings.

A specific example of how this “inter-flow” principle was considered for every aspect of the Center can be seen in the Planning
Committee's objection to the architects' original plan for the galleries, which were to be in a squat, one-story structure, separated from the other buildings. We complained that this made them merely another museum, isolated from the ebb and flow of people on the campus. We suggested that the galleries be situated on the second floor of the Theatre Building (its first-floor lobby was also a concourse) where students, in the daytime, and the public, attending evening events, would be attracted to the painting, sculpture, and crafts exhibitions. The architects not only agreed, but put floor-to-ceiling gallery windows in the upper well of the theatre lobby. Day and night, many of the structures and colors of artworks could be seen from below—a continuing display of ongoing attractions in the visual arts.

A distinctive feature of the theatre itself was its flexibility in regard to both thrust- and proscenium-staging. Normally the theatre, with thrust-stage, would seat 550 people. Sharp-rise seating around three sides of the stage would make it possible for every member of the audience—even those sitting in the eleventh and last row—to have a clear and close view of the performances. Experts were also consulted to provide a variety of different acoustical situations to suit whatever would be staged. The theatre would not be limited to plays, but would be used for orchestral and choral concerts, recitals, lecture-demonstrations, and dance concerts as well. Hydraulic-electric devices would make it possible to lower the entire thrust-stage so that it disappeared, transforming the theatre into a 600-seat proscenium-type interior. Portions of the floor could also be lowered to form an orchestra pit for musical comedies and certain types of dance performances. Other features of the Theatre Building included a lower-level rehearsal room with a stage of the exact measurements of the thrust-stage, dance studios, and numerous shops for scenery, costuming, and stage design.

The Art Building had studios and classrooms adapted for every art activity: ceramics, sculpture, graphic arts, painting, photography, film, design, weaving. Between the Art Building and the Theatre was a sculpture court which served as both an outdoor working area (there was direct access to it from the interior studios) and an exhibition space.

Although the 300-seat Recital Hall was conceived mainly for chamber music, it also was flexible in its uses; and the Lecture-auditorium would serve equally well for film showings, theatre workshop productions, and lectures.
In the 1960s (the Fine Arts Center was completed in 1968), some cultural historians had complained that, although support for the arts was increasing, much of this manifested itself in a national "edifice complex"—that more money was being poured into hundreds of arts halls and centers than into badly-needed support for artists and arts organizations themselves. Our Fine Arts Center defied such a trend. More than a cluster of performance and exhibition spaces, it provided learning and studio space for 900 Fine Arts majors and 75 faculty members, and was a locus for over 150 arts events annually. It offered, because of its many resources, the widest possible range in the arts: from the classic to the contemporary, from the traditional to the experimental and the challenging. The arts could flourish here, free from the restraints and limitations of box-office commercialism. In addition, with opening of this Center, metropolitan Milwaukee had its first multipurpose performing arts building complex.

The Center, of course, also became the home of the Summer Arts Festival, which had continued and expanded each year. The selection process for the artists-in-residence began during the academic year, when faculty committees, departmental chairpersons, and administrators wrote letters, made phone calls, and conducted interviews. The artists were chosen not only for their reputation, but for their ability to be articulate and interested teachers.

Thus, when summer arrived, students, faculty and the community were offered the rich experiences of seeing, hearing, and meeting great creative personalities from the arts world beyond the campus. There was stimulation and controversy, and sometimes even shock, in observing and talking with such gifted people as composers Leon Kirchner and Milton Babbitt; painters Carl Holty and Lester Johnson; poets James Dickey and Kenneth Rexroth; dancers Ruth Currier and Lucas Hoving; musicians Sylvia Marlowe and Leon Fleisher; and theatre directors Alan Schneider and Gene Frankel. These—and many others—gave all of us fresh, invigorating ideas about the arts. Altogether, up to 1974, more than 60 artists-in-residence came to the campus.

The Arts Festival also included chamber music, modern dance, ballet, theatre, painting/sculpture/crafts exhibitions and experimental film series. There were concerts by a Festival Orchestra including the members of the Fine Arts Quartet, the New York Woodwind Quintet (and later our own Woodwind Arts Quintet), musicians from the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (and its
predecessors), music faculty, and selected students. Among the conductors were Thor Johnson, Robert Whitney and Leonard Sorkin.

As a logical extension of the successful summer program, artists-in-residence were now appointed during the academic year as well. The four Fine Arts departments (and in the case of poets, the English Department cooperating) invited artists to teach, perform, lecture and conduct workshops.

Enrollments, as well as programs, continued to grow; and, as student involvement in university policies increased nationally, the School sought more student advice in academic decisions. In 1968, a Student Advisory Committee to the Dean was formed; members (representing their organizations in the various departments) were recommended by departmental chairpersons. The Committee met every two months; problems, issues, and proposals were frankly (and, if requested, confidentially) discussed; and if so directed by the students recommendations were relayed to the departments. The departments also created means by which students could communicate their opinions directly.

With the new quadrangle of buildings, an energetic faculty, and a steadily increasing enrollment, the School had become not only a respected academic unit, but a magnetic force for the arts in the Milwaukee area. The Milwaukee Sentinel described it as a “haven of the arts,” but our goals went beyond that. In the 1960s the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was one of the pioneering urban institutions of its kind in the nation. We of the School of Fine Arts felt we had a mission, a major commitment to our city. We therefore began to offer both cooperation and initiative to the urban sector, wherever requested or needed. Major projects developed by us, always in consultation and participation with citizen groups, were:

The People’s Theatre
Formed in 1968 by G. L. Wallace, who had been appointed Inner City Arts Consultant to the Dean, this was the city’s first black repertory group. Despite very limited resources, the company quickly won the respect of the community and has enjoyed critical and public approval.

The University Ballet
This, the city’s first continuing ballet ensemble, was organized in 1966 with the participation of faculty and students in the Departments of
Dance, Music, and Theatre Arts. The latter two departments contributed their resources for staging, design, and a good orchestra.

The Milwaukee Ballet Company
In the fall of 1969 we were asked if the School would co-sponsor an attempt to found a repertory ballet for Milwaukee. A few months later, in response to invitations sent out by the School, a group of about 50 ballet enthusiasts met on campus to organize support for such a group. The School provided rehearsal and performance space for a number of years; the organization also got advice and participation from the faculty and students of the Dance Department.

Symphony-on-Campus
For many years the Milwaukee Symphony was invited annually to be “in residence” for a week on campus. Daily rehearsals in the Fine Arts Theatre were open to students and public; many thereby had their first opportunity to attend a symphony rehearsal. The orchestra included faculty composers’ works in either “reading sessions” or in concert; and the visit would culminate in a free evening program.

The Community Theatre Institute
The Theatre Arts Department, hoping for a closer relationship with many community theatres in the area, inaugurated an informal community theatre organization which later evolved into what is now a similar state group.

The Preparatory Arts Division
With the realization that in the arts, especially in dance, training must begin before college age, University Extension Arts, in cooperation with the School of Fine Arts, began offering pre-college and children’s classes in dance, theatre, and visual arts. This program has continued to enroll hundreds of students annually.

Downtown Concerts
Co-sponsored with the First Wisconsin National Bank, the Fine Arts Quartet, Woodwind Arts Quintet, and other artist/faculty from the Music Department gave a series of concerts in Vogel Hall (Performing Arts Center) every spring.

Art Exhibitions
The Department of Art, which got its first full-time gallery director in 1963, mounted literally hundreds of exhibitions in the years 1963-74. National invitational exhibitions included Paintings, and Sculpture, ’64: the “10/10” Invitational Photography Exhibition; National Crafts
Exhibition; National Print Exhibition; and "Mice that Roar," National Political Cartoon Exhibition. Also, the department's own faculty and student exhibitions have made the Fine Arts Galleries a continuous showcase of significant and exciting traditional and contemporary art every month of the year.

**Inner City Film Workshop**

This workshop provided a range of activities and experiences for economically disadvantaged inner-city youth through the medium of photography. The age range was from 10-18. The younger people worked with art and animated films, and the older youth dealt with live-action films and still photography.

The above programs, mentioned to illustrate the School's outreach in the urban community, constituted only some of the projects developed by the departments.

In theatre, at least five classical and contemporary plays received major productions annually; the small studio theatre was used for student and experimental plays. The University Players won national honors from the American College Theatre Festival for a production staged in Washington D. C. at Kennedy Center.

In music, in addition to the traditional band, symphony orchestra, and choral concerts, numerous faculty and student recitals and operas were presented; baroque and contemporary ensembles were developed. A "Composers' Showcase" series with works by music faculty and students was instituted.

In dance, faculty and student concerts were presented each semester; and companies of international fame—those of Jose Limon, Erick Hawkins, and others—were brought to the campus for from one to three weeks, for teaching, workshops, and performance.

By the time the School celebrated its tenth birthday (1973), it had demonstrated in many ways the advantages of combining the arts under one academic roof. The North Central Association of Colleges and Universities described it as follows:

Perhaps this is the most impressive example of how the UWM has been able to achieve high quality by concentrating its resources. Unlike its parent campus the Milwaukee campus has been able to bring together all creative performers in the arts into one School housed in a single complex, the Fine Arts Center . . . Clearly, from all respects, this is one of the most distinguished and successful efforts of the University!
In enrollment (majors), the School was now among the first 10 of 100 or more similar schools in the nation. Some of its faculty had achieved international recognition.

The short history of the School also showed that such an academic structure could nurture a climate of creativity. New student plays were continually being produced; original faculty and student choreography was being presented. Of the 147 exhibitors in the 1971 Wisconsin Designer-Craftsmen Exhibition, 47 were faculty, students, or former students of our Art Department. They received 10 of the 22 awards of the exhibition. Three faculty composers won national recognition; their works and their students’ works were performed on campus by faculty and student ensembles.

Although some problems remained, such as the prevalent (and national) disproportion in salaries between artist-faculty and other university faculty, and the need for additional classroom and performance space, solutions were gradually being found. The auditorium of Engelman Hall, although being renovated for the School of Architecture, was equipped for some stage and concert presentations. And, in the spring of 1974, planning was begun for an extensive renovation of Mitchell Hall, with large areas assigned to the School. In May of that year, the University Faculty Senate approved plans for a needed fifth department—Film Arts. And a new Master of Performing Arts degree was proposed and approved by our faculty and the University administration, for the next biennium.

In character with the history of the State of Wisconsin itself, a history distinguished by innovation and progress in both social and educational areas, the School of Fine Arts at UWM continued in its pioneering directions. It demonstrated pragmatically the advantages of an “alliance” between the arts; that, indeed, such cooperation was a logical development in a century where art forms had become more related than ever before. It also demonstrated that a school of the arts can greatly strengthen the arts in a metropolitan area. It can use its human and technical resources to reveal the value and profundity of the old, and at the same time the excitement and necessity of the new.

Finally, if any single word describes the spirit of this School, it is “interflow.” From the earliest manifestation of cooperation between departments and visiting summer artists, through the subsequent formation and development of the School, there was an interflow of goodwill and mutual effort between administration and faculty, faculty and students, creators and performers. The physical
proximity, the common curriculum, the innovative programs made this interflow natural, continual and rewarding for all.

NOTATIONS

1. Artists-in-residence had come to the campus as early as 1955 for the *Summer Evenings of Music* series; however, they obviously represented only one art form.

2. Subsequently, similar schools of the arts have been formed at UW-Whitewater, UW-Stevens Point, and UW-Superior of the University of Wisconsin System.

3. The Art History Department elected not to join the new School.

4. The *People's Theatre, Preparatory Arts Division*, and the *Inner City Film Workshop* were implemented with the invaluable cooperation and assistance of the University Extension Arts, which also inaugurated many workshops with the Department of Music.