

University of Connecticut
Undergraduate Education ♦ First Year Programs ♦ Learning Communities
Division of Student Affairs ♦ Residential Life

Learning Community Activity Highlights



Fall 2008

**Fine Arts
Residential Learning Community**

**Connecting with the Arts
Residential Learning Community**

<http://www.lc.uconn.edu>

Fine Arts Learning Community, Buckley

Community Directors: Eva Gorbants, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs & Director of Advising, Fine Arts
Kevin Sullivan, Assistant Director, First Year Programs

Fall 2008 Course: INTD 1820.012 *LC Fine Arts*, Eva Gorbants, Kevin Sullivan

Students: 19

The Fine Arts Learning Community is designed to offer a supportive and dynamic environment for first year art, art history, dramatic arts and music majors. Students will have opportunities to connect with faculty across the various disciplines in fine arts. Course topics, programming and special events will be geared towards developing a vibrant, cohesive, and diverse residential community for the arts.

- For the past two years of the Fine Arts Learning Community's five year history, the course theme has been the Heroes Journey, a model describing how the human animal deals with challenges. The centerpiece of the model rests on an understanding of Jungian archetypes, which, most often, can be seen in painting, sculpture, music, literature, and dramatic works. Students were introduced to the archetypes by assessing which ones were most active in their lives at the moment. They also had a semester-long project to chart the Heroes Journey in one of the CRT or Broadway productions they were required to attend (*Spring Awakening*, *Young Frankenstein*, *A Man for All Seasons* or *The Skin of Our Teeth*). In addition, they experienced their personality preferences, along with a number of projective techniques designed to help them learn more about themselves. Choice Theory, time management, study skills, relaxation techniques, and the fine points of how to manage a demanding major were also covered.
- The Fine Arts Learning Community joined their partner community, Connecting with the Arts, on a bus trip to Broadway in November. Half of the students saw *Spring Awakening*, and the other half selected *Young Frankenstein*. After the performance of *Young Frankenstein*, three actors (Matthew LaBanca, a UConn Fine Arts alum; Fred Applegate, and Kevin Ligon) had an exclusive Q&A with the UConn LCs after the performance. When offered a Fine Arts Learning Community t-shirt, Matt graciously accepted and put it on for a photo op.
- Community members participated in, and supported each other in, their dramatic presentations, music and vocal performances, and studio art work.
- Community members in the UConn Marching Band (UCMB) kept the community current on predicting wins and losses for the UConn football team. Some of these same musicians tried out for, and won, spots in the various bands that support UConn's basketball teams.
- Jennifer Barnhart, '98 SFA, one of this year's highlighted 40 Under 40 Alumnus, was a Guest Speaker in class.
- Selected student quotes ...
 - “I have become more confident within the college experience.”
 - “I have learned to interact with people I might not have before.”
 - “I'm much more comfortable with myself, who I am, and who I want to be.”
 - “I'm more optimistic and accepting of change.”
 - “I'm more relaxed and not so worried about how well I'm doing academically I know I can handle college courses now.”

Jennifer Barnhart, 36 Puppeteer and Actor

Jennifer Barnhart '98 (SFA) enrolled at UConn to earn a degree in acting. Though she had been fascinated by puppetry since childhood, it was only after she was accepted to the University Scholars program that she discovered the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry. Her experience there would later change her life.

After completing her degree with honors, Barnhart spent five years scuffling in New York. Like most young actors, she took a desk job to support herself while waiting for her big break.

That came in 1999 when she landed the puppeteer role of Cleo in PBS's immensely popular "Between the Lions" children's show. Her work in "Lions" led to roles in "Bear in the Big Blue House," "Book of Pooh" and "Sesame Street." In 2003 she joined the cast of a new Broadway show that is described as "Sesame Street meets South Park." The show, "Avenue Q," won the 2004 Tony Award for Best Musical and has since become one of Broadway's most popular shows.

Even as she continues to perform eight shows a week on stage, she has expanded her work to include the Disney Channel children's show "Johnny and the Sprites," created by her "Avenue Q" co-star John Tartaglia.

She has also recently completed work on a new Connecticut Public Television music education series, "Lomax: The Hound of Music," on which she plays a cat named Delta (see photo). The show will be aired nationally on local PBS stations.

Her training in puppetry, says Barnhart, has made a significant difference in her career. "Without it, I would be just another tall, blonde, deep-voiced actress in New York," she says.



Photo by Peter Morenus

Connecting with the Arts Residential Learning Community, Buckley

Community Directors: Rodney Rock, Director, Jorgensen Performing Arts
Frank Mack, Manager of Theater Operations, Dramatic Arts Department
Lesa von Munkwitz-Smith, Program Assistant, First Year Programs

Fall 2008 Course: INTD 1820.035 *LC Connecting with the Arts*, R. Rock, F. Mack, L. von Munkwitz-Smith

Students: 22

The Connecting with the Arts Learning Community is for students who wish to explore their interest in the arts through attendance to art, theater, and music events on and off campus and participation in discussions with artists, actors, directors, and musicians. This Community is open to all first year students. Students who are interested in the arts, but not enrolled in the School of Fine Arts are especially encouraged to participate.

Programs

- Trip to NYC with the Fine Arts Learning Community to attend a matinee Broadway show (half the group saw *Spring Awakening*, and the other, *Young Frankenstein*, which is scheduled to close on Jan 4, 2009).
- After the performance of *Young Frankenstein* three actors (Matthew LaBanca, a UConn Fine Arts alum; Fred Applegate, and Kevin Ligon) had an exclusive Q&A with the UConn LLCs after the performance. When offered a Fine Arts Learning Community t-shirt, Matt graciously accepted and put it on for a photo op.



- Students received free tickets to multiple events sponsored by the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts and two plays performed by the Connecticut Repertory Theatre.

Community

- Connecting with the Arts Learning Community t-shirts were distributed on freshmen move-in day.
- On November 20, several students performed for the rest of the class. Alex Young showed two artworks she had completed: a photo of a guitar with Gampel Pavilion reflected in the body of the guitar, and a digitally manipulated work she calls *Mother Earth*. Kelsea Whittemore and Eliza Smith led the entire class and visitors from ResLife (Steve Kremer, Neil Kaufman, and Logan Trimble) in improvisation. Ben Carlson (lead vocal and guitar), Kyle Horton (piano and backup vocals) and Michael Barnes (bass) performed two alt rock songs.

Coursework

- Behind-the-scenes tours of the Jorgensen Center of Performing Arts by director Rodney Rock, the William Benton Museum of Art by director Tom Bruhn, the Contemporary Art Gallery by director Barry Rosenberg.
- The class returned to the Benton for a docent-guided tour when the monks from Namgyal Monastery were constructing the sand mandala of Enlightenment.
- Frank Mack guided the class in backstage tours of the three Connecticut Repertory Theatre stages: the Harriet S. Jorgensen Theatre, the Nafe Kader Theatre, and the Mobius Studio Theatre.
- After an introduction to Laura Crow, Professor of Costume Design, the group had an informal Q&A session with her about the costumes in *A Man for All Seasons*.
- Dr. John Bell, director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, brought specimens of puppets from the museum's collection and spoke about the history of puppetry and evolution of puppets into digital characters such as Golum in *Lord of the Rings*.
- Greg Webster, a Visiting Professor of movement, visited and involved the entire class in movement exercises. Through a series of directed reactions, he demonstrated how movement in plays and movies creates tension.
- The Assad Brothers, Sergio and Odair, are World Music musicians with a classical guitar background mixed with Brazilian folk music. They stopped by for a visit with the class, discussed their careers, their music influences, and performed several songs.
- Six students from the UConn Opera program performed songs from three different operas: *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* by Wolfgang Mozart, and *Manon* by Jules Massenet.
- Keith Lockhart, conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra, visited and conducted an exclusive Q&A with the class. Fine Arts faculty Peter Bagley and Jeffrey Renshaw, and Dean David Woods accompanied the maestro.
- Kalia Kellogg, member of the Connecticut Opera Chorus and belly dancer, appeared as a guest artist for the last class of the semester and performed dances from four main styles of belly dance, lectured on the history of belly dance in the US, and then engaged the students in belly dance instruction. Steve Jarvi and David Quimette, visitors to the class, enjoyed the instruction immensely.

Class offers array of arts-related experiences for students

UConn Advance, by Carol Davidge, December 1, 2008

When the charismatic Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart visited the Connecting with the Arts class at Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts, the students had a lot of questions. How did he become a conductor? What were some of the unusual things he had experienced? What does he like about his job? Is he composing anything right now?

Lockhart's answers were full of surprises. He had an ordinary childhood in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., with parents who had grown up in the Great Depression and were determined to provide for their children the things they had missed. So Lockhart started piano lessons when he was seven. He added clarinet in the high school band. When he went to Furman University, a private liberal arts college in South Carolina, he tried to prepare for "a real job" as a lawyer, but found he really wasn't interested in it and decided to go into music. An instructor observed that Lockhart seemed to enjoy the teaching and interpretation of music more than playing the piano, and advised him to study conducting. And that's how he became a conductor.

Learning to appreciate the arts. This encounter with America's best-known conductor was just one of the many arts-related experiences for students in the class, a First Year Experience course for non-arts majors organized by Jorgensen director Rodney Rock. "The University of Connecticut has an amazing array of options to offer students who want to explore the arts," says Rock. "Once the students realize that they have some outstanding opportunities, they have the knowledge to take advantage of all the performances, productions, and exhibitions during the rest of their years here. We hope that these students will develop a deep appreciation for the arts and become the audience and advocates for the arts in the communities where they live," adds Rock, who invites an array of School of Fine Arts professionals and visiting guest artists to the class and arranges for students to attend events.

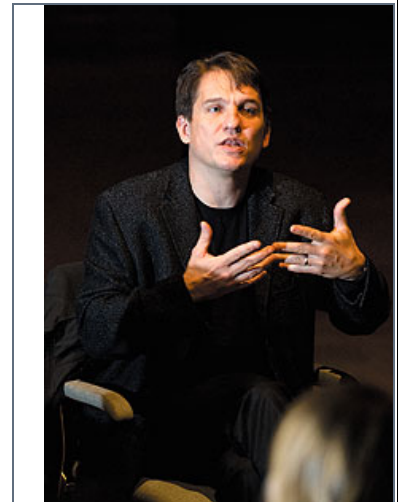
"I have been introduced to some unfamiliar styles of performance, and that has broadened my appreciation for the arts as a whole," says Christina Tobitsch, one of the students in the class. In the week before Lockhart's class visit, the students traveled to New York to see either *Spring Awakening* or *Young Frankenstein* on Broadway. Those who attended *Young Frankenstein* met Matt LaBanca, a UConn voice graduate (1998) who understudies the lead role of Dr. Frederick Frankenstein. During opening night, actor Roger Bart injured his back, and LaBanca took over for several nights.

Each class was different. Most of the students had never seen any opera until music professor Constance Rock brought her voice students to the class to perform four opera scenes. They also had the opportunity to watch Tibetan Monks from the Namgyal Monastery creating a sand mandala at The Benton Museum, saw exhibits at the Contemporary Art Galleries and the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, and attended performances at Jorgensen and the Connecticut Repertory Theatre (CRT), all in the School of Fine Arts.

Tameka Geneste, an international business major, says she enjoyed the back-stage tour of CRT and seeing "how the insider puts on a play and all the work that actually goes into making every component work." CRT director Frank Mack says his goal is to help the students better understand the theatre productions they are seeing. The result, he says, is that "they have acquired an exceptional capacity to engage as audience members in new and exciting ways."

Meeting the artists added another dimension. "We don't just learn about the artists, we meet them," says Alexandra Young, a pathology major. In October, virtuoso guitarists Sergio and Odair Assad came to class, in addition to performing at Jorgensen. "It was great to 'hang out' with professional musicians," says Kyle Horton, a chemical engineering major. "The Assad Brothers were normal people, except for the fact that they decided to dedicate all of their efforts to music instead of any other job."

Universal appeal. In answer to questions from the class, Lockhart noted that music truly is universal, that it exists outside cultural boundaries and doesn't rely on language in order to communicate powerful emotions. He said he tries to open people's expectations about what an orchestra does by having the Pops perform many types of music – from the great classics to the contemporary and diverse. Lockhart will be back at UConn with the Pops on Dec. 6 for a winter gala performance at Jorgensen. "Maestro Lockhart mentioned to me that of the many groups he spoke to during his visit to campus, the Connecting with the Arts students had the most thoughtful questions," says David G. Woods, dean of the School of Fine Arts, who invited Lockhart to campus as featured speaker for the Dean Robert H. Gray Memorial Lecture. "We hope these encounters help students gain rare insights that can add to their own life experiences."



Keith Lockhart, conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra, talks with students during a First Year Experience class at Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts. Photo by Frank Dahlmeyer