

PPAA

National Art Education Association

PPAA News

By Sarah Ackermann, PhD



For this issue of PPAA News, it was a pleasure to sit down and have a virtual chat with the advisors and student leaders of the University of Central Arkansas' Students for the Arts (SftA) program, a part of Arkansans for the Arts (ARftA). The mission of the [Arkansans for the Arts](#) (2021) is to advance the arts, arts education, and the creative economy in Arkansas.

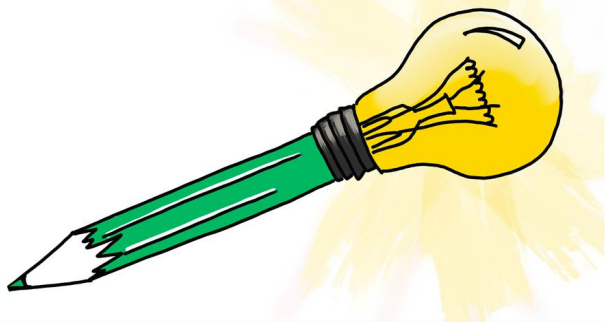
You will hear from student leaders, Olivia Fleming, Executive President (below, left) and Avery Rudolph, Vice President (below, right).



ARKANSANS
FOR THE ARTS
EDUCATE | INFORM | ADVANCE

You will also hear from Dr. Gayle Seymour (below), founding faculty advisor for SftA. She serves as Professor of Art History and Associate Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Central Arkansas.





PPAA

National Art Education Association

Dr. Seymour oversees the university's Artists in Residence program, which brings 15-20 artists from around the US and beyond to campus annually to work with students through exhibits, performances, craft talks, masterclasses, screenings, readings, workshops, and other one-on-one interactions. Dr. Seymour is an award-winning teacher (Carnegie U.S. Professors of the Year, master's universities and colleges recipient) and an active grant writer. She has authored and received grants totaling more than two million dollars.



Dr. Trina Harlow (left), Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of Central Arkansas, now serves as co-advisor

for UCA SftA with Dr. Seymour. Dr. Harlow is an active member of the National Art Education Association and was just elected to a multi-year term on the NAEA National Board of Directors as the Higher Education

Division-Director-Elect for two years, and then the Director for two years. Dr. Harlow is the President of NAEA PPAA, and was just elected to the Board of Directors for ARftA and was appointed to a board position on the Arkansas Art Educator President's Foundation.

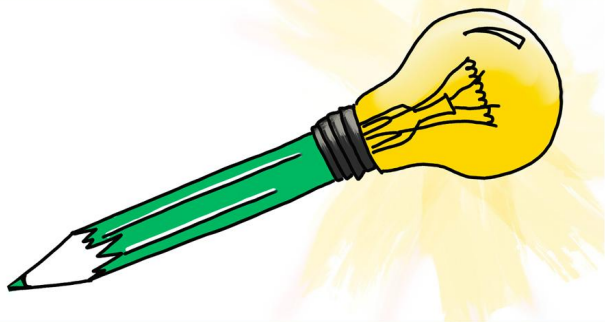
My Interview With Leadership



How was SftA at UCA founded?



Dr. Seymour: In November 2018, Arkansans for the Arts (ARftA), of which I am a member of the board, hosted its first Arts Advocacy Day at the Arkansas State Capitol. At the time, there was an especially enthusiastic core group of



PPAA

National Art Education Association

student leaders in the UCA art department and I thought this event would be a good way to get them involved. I procured a van from the UCA motor pool and enlisted students who would record demographics of attendees through structured observation techniques and conduct random intercept surveys. On the way back to campus, the students were so excited about what they had heard and experienced. They brainstormed various ideas and decided to form Students for the Arts.

During the spring semester 2019, the group created a constitution and worked with the university to form Students for the Arts as a Registered Student Organization (RSO). The students elected officers that semester and they were off to the races. ARftA invited one of the students to attend the National Arts Action Summit, Washington, DC, March 6, 2019, which also added to the enthusiasm of the burgeoning club.

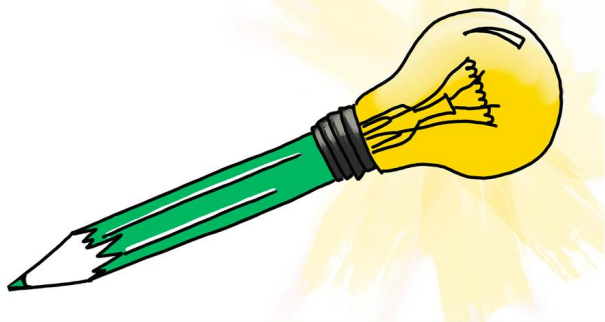
What is the purpose of the group?

Dr. Seymour: Students need to understand that the arts make our communities desirable places to live. They create vibrancy in communities,

which attracts talent and allows businesses to retain that talent. In addition to adding joy and beauty to our lives, they are a significant driver of the U.S. economy, supporting 5.2 million creative and arts sector jobs and generating \$919.7 billion in value in the U.S., representing 4.3% of the gross domestic product ([National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. 2020](#)). SftA strives to develop future arts leaders who understand the power they have in the community and have the tools to effect change.

Avery Rudolph: UCA Students for the Arts is a resource for individuals who are artists or involved in creative activities. As Vice President, I have always promoted that the word 'art' is an overarching term for creative people. This means that people employed as doctors, law enforcement officers, or farmers are artists. Why? They have to be ready to address an unexpected situation at any given time, manage conflicts, and think outside of the box. That sounds like an artist to me!

As someone who majors in Art History and has doubted whether an art degree holds value, I also want to push our student body to recognize that art does



PPAA

National Art Education Association

catalyze change and impact people's lives. We hope to inspire and challenge students to step outside of their comfort zone by speaking with lawmakers to see that politicians enjoy hearing young people's voices and our opinions matter. Students for the Arts bring speakers to our monthly meetings to explain the benefits of art, including improved mental or physical health, shared experiences, and expanding job opportunities, which further supports that the arts are worth funding.

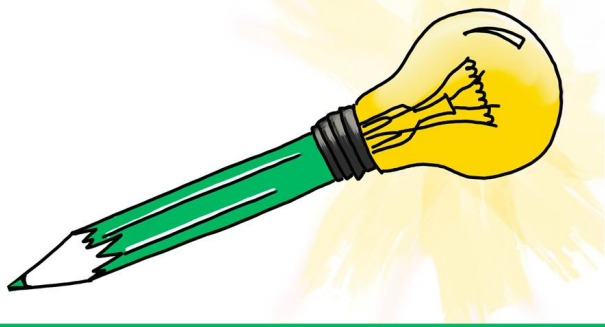
Apart from advocacy, we are a safe space for students of all backgrounds and degrees. We hope to help our members grow and become better connected to their communities by organizing events that bring local businesses and artists together, highlighting projects, and introducing new ideas. We want to prepare students for the real world. Because the arts are multifaceted - involves politics, environment, and economics - we believe we can help contribute a solid foundation of skills and knowledge to prepare them for their future. We want artists and creative minds to stay in Arkansas.



Members of Students for the Arts pose with State Legislators: Back row (L-R) Sidney McCoy, Nick Palmer, Senator Joyce Elliott, Representative Tippi McCullough, Monika Cunningham; Front row (L-R) Louise Mandumbwa, Associate Dean Gayle Seymour, Madison Conklin, Nakeya Palmer, Representative Jamie Scott. Arkansans for the Art\$ Town Hall meeting, Oct. 27, 2019, Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub, North Little Rock.

Do you have guiding principles?

Dr. Seymour: According to the SftA Constitution, the purpose shall be "to act as the campus arm of the Arkansans for the Arts, which aims to provide leadership focused on the promotion and advancement of the creative economy, on transforming policy in arts education, and uniting the state into one voice with a call to action by policy makers to increase investment in the



PPAA

National Art Education Association

arts. The major goal shall be to provide students with the ability to advance the arts, arts education, and the creative economy in Arkansas."

*Avery Rudolph: The following are principals that I would like to implement next year: **A.R.T.S.***

A - Advocacy. *Advocate the arts, expansion of the creative economy, and value for the greater good.*

R - Revitalize. *Art can heal, form connections between different cultures, bring people together, initiate tough conversations, and introduce new ideas.*

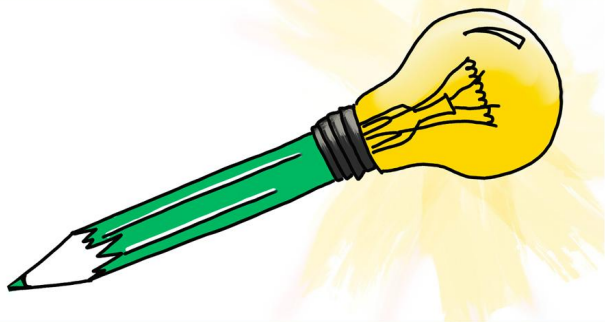
T - Transformative. *Art promotes change in our economy, politics, and environment, but it starts with the individual. Actions speak louder than words.*

S - Support. *Although our RSO emphasizes visual arts, we also support all job endeavors and backgrounds because we believe everyone is creative. Sometimes students doubt having an art degree is worthwhile, we are here to continue proving it is valuable and ignite their passion for it.*

What have been some of the activities of the group?

Dr. Seymour: The first activity SftA coordinated was a Student Arts Showcase, titled "Who Art You," October 6, 2019, at UCA Downtown, a community venue in Conway's historic downtown. The organizers of ArtsFest, produced by Conway Alliance for the Arts (CAFTA), invited SftA to create an event for their annual arts festival in Conway. In order to share the artistic output of students with the public, SftA hosted an evening of family-friendly art demonstrations, musical performances, film screenings, and readings by students. This high energy event drew a diverse audience of more than 100 people. The collaboration led CAFTA to invite SftA to have a permanent seat on their board of directors.

Avery Rudolph: This semester, our members took part in the Press Conference for the Arts and Technology Act recently passed. We joined Arkansans for the Arts at the capitol to set up for the event and record Senator Joyce Elliott and Representative Les Warren as they announced the bill to the floor. It was an inspiring day. I am grateful to say I witnessed the origins of an Act that is a landmark of progress for our creative economy.



PPAA

National Art Education Association



Students for the Arts President Nakeya Palmer poses with Senator Joyce Elliott. Art\$ Town Hall meeting, Oct. 27, 2019, Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub, North Little Rock.

Dr. Seymour: SftA members have attended multiple ARftA-sponsored Town Halls around the state. At each one, students have been able to interact with state legislators and officers of state and regional granting agencies, such as Arkansas Arts Council and Mid-America Arts Alliance.

SftA members hold recruiting events each August at "Conway Daze," a welcome event for entering freshmen. In the SftA booth, event attendees "Give the Arts a Turn," vending machines that dispense SftA keychains or buttons.

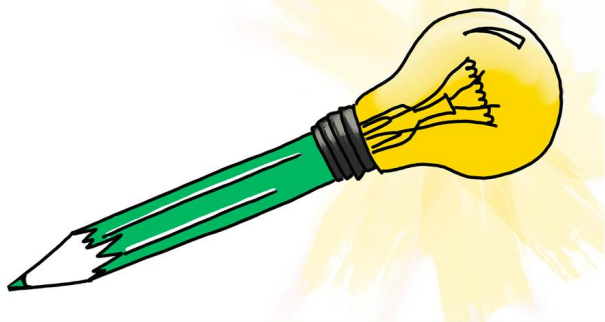


Students for the Arts table at Conway Daze freshman welcome event, August 19, 2020, University of Central Arkansas.



Students for the Arts distribute keychains and buttons via "Give The Arts A Turn" vending machine, Conway Daze freshman welcome event, Aug. 19, 2020.

SftA wrote an article for the August 18 ARftA Newsletter, [UCA Students for the Arts Begins a New Year with Hope and Determination \(Cunningham, n.d.\)](#)



PPAA

National Art Education Association

For the 2020 Artsfest celebration, which was virtual due to the pandemic, SftA members created 50 self-care kits, stressing the importance of self-care and mindfulness during stressful pandemic times. The kits included a canvas pouch, laser engraved wooden stamps designed by students, fabric paint, a playlist, and information about SftA. The students also created a demo video about relief printmaking to go along with the kits.



Citrus Self-Care Kit, designed by SftA member Louise Mandumbwa, 14th-Annual Virtual ArtsFest, Oct. 5, 2020. SftA members created 50 self-care supplies kits and invited attendees to a Zoom "How To" Party.

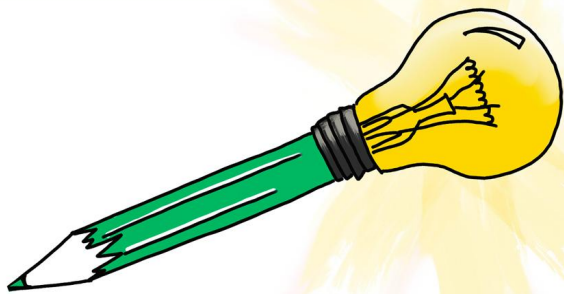
Avery Rudolph: Our most successful group activity was the day we hosted members of Arkansans for the Arts: Sandy Martin, Mary Taylor, Erin Holiday, and Talicia Richardson. During that meeting, the President and I ensured that students were given a chance to speak with the adults about why individuals with art degrees do not want

to stay in Arkansas and what type of opportunities they would like to see in the future to convince them to stay. The conversations were both productive and gave us greater insight into what needs to be improved in our legislation and what regions need more significant funding.

What advice would you provide other universities interested in starting a Students for the Arts organization?

Dr. Seymour: Do it! Our Gen-Z students are the most well-educated generation yet. They are digital natives, progressive, and diverse. They want to be involved in order to make a difference in their communities.

Avery Rudolph: Organization, efficiency, and strategy are critical. More importantly, you need a President and Vice President who respect one another and whose personalities are different enough to balance each other. I have enjoyed working with Olivia and getting to know her. She is much more spirited and less serious than I am, so she adds a fresh perspective each time we convene about upcoming events we are planning. You also need to be as creative as possible to keep members



PPAA

National Art Education Association

and followers on social platforms engaged. With COVID-19, I knew in-person engagement would be limited, so I started hosting live events on Instagram to speak with local artists about their work and hopefully spread greater awareness of their projects. So make sure that no matter what setbacks occur, you have alternative ways of reaching out to people and continuing to push your objectives. Finally, make sure you are having fun, and your members are too. If you're not, then the responsibilities will take a toll on you in time, and you need to reassess what direction you are headed in. Always show your members you appreciate their involvement, no matter how little or small it is.

Olivia Fleming: I'd advise first reaching out to Arkansans for the Arts. The board members on the team, like Garbo Hearne, are extremely knowledgeable and helpful. After all, they are essentially the "parents" of our organization. Next, find advisors with a lot of experience and passion for the creative economy and the arts as a whole. Gayle Seymour and Trina Harlow are perfect examples of this with their diverse backgrounds in education and dedication to improving the arts both locally and nationally. I

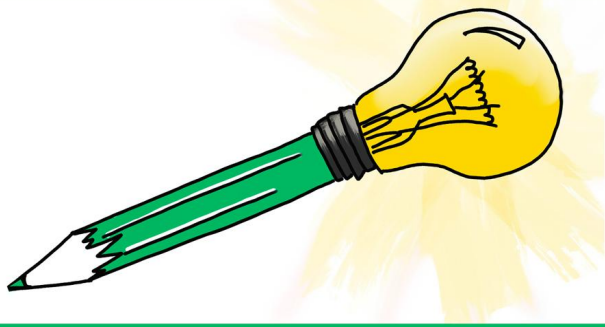
believe the last major step is finding students that want to be involved and engage them through various activities such as guest speakers, extracurricular events, and/or by simply reaching out to them with interest. After all these steps, an organization is born! But like any project, it must be given attention and treated with care through constant interaction and new plans to further its growth.

Closure



During an undeniably tumultuous year, groups like University of Central Arkansas' Students for the Arts (SftA) bring a sense of hope and rejuvenation to the field. Dr. Seymour and Dr. Harlow share this sentiment perfectly:

Dr. Seymour: To say that the pandemic has made it difficult for students to participate in extracurricular activities, would be an understatement! This year has been incredibly stressful for students and yet the officers and members of SftA continued on with the work of the organization, they reached out to other students who needed help,



PPAA

National Art Education Association

and they did it all with grace and generosity. I am a very proud advisor.

Dr. Harlow: After being on faculty at another university for six years, I joined UCA as this pandemic school year started. It has been an honor to come on board UCA's SftA's as a co-advisor with Dr. Seymour and I have truly been so impressed with the dedication that she and the student leaders had for this organization during this difficult year for education. I look forward to working with SftA in the future.

Special thanks to Olivia Fleming, Avery Rudolph, Dr. Seymour, and Dr. Harlow for taking the time to share their passion and experiences with PPAA readership!

To make inquiries about UCA SftA, please contact tharlow@uca.edu.

PPAA Contacts

President: [Dr. Trina Harlow](#)
University of Central Arkansas
President-Elect: [Beth Dobberstein](#)
K-12 Art Teacher, Eagle, Wisconsin
Communication Liaison: [Dr. Sarah Ackermann](#)
Ball State University

References

Arkansans for the Arts. (2021). *Mission and history*.
<https://arkansansforthearts.org/about-us/>
Cunningham, M.A.. (n.d.). *UCA Students for the Arts begin a new year with hope and determination*. Arkansans for the Arts.
<https://arkansansforthearts.org/blog/uca-students-for-the-arts-begin-a-new-year-with-hope-and-determination.html>
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. (2020). *Facts and figures on the creative economy*.
https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/facts-figures-on-the-creative-economy/