

Austin Community College

By Minnie Miles

"When you're sixteen, Goin' on seventeen," there is much to consider.

In addition to the administrative headquarters, there are six ACC campuses, and additional locations shared with other services where ACC accredited instruction is offered. The enrollment for the Fall, 1988 semester is over 21,000 students.

We are located in the high energy capital city of the great state of Texas. The atmosphere and nature of the city attracts the integration of peoples of varying cultures and many nationalities. Many of them attend ACC and go forth en route to their higher academic goals or gainful employment.

ACC was founded in 1973 at the Ridgeview Campus site. Since then, Austin Community College has grown from an idea to a necessity.

There have been many changes in the administration at ACC, and reorganization in the academic pattern of the instructional divisions and departments. The Fine Arts department is a part of this transition, undergoing a "metamorphosis" or perhaps a "regeneration". The Fine Arts "department" has actually been the Fine Arts "departments." Each Fine Arts department was administered by the division chairperson of the Humanities Division of a particular campus. This Fall semester 1988-89, administration of the Fine Arts department was changed, for the better, to a "college-wide" concept, with its own department head. So even though we are in separate locations, the efforts, goals, enthusiasm and hard work have all been united into one.

There are three full-time and sixteen part-time instructors in the department. All are practicing artists



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with the exception of those specialized in Art History. Rio Grande and Ridgeview are the only two campuses with permanent facilities for total curriculum requirements toward the Associate of Arts degree. Drawing, Design, Introduction to Visual Arts, Art History, and Ceramics are offered at outreach campuses. The first of the Fine Arts at Austin Community College was a summer course in Art Appreciation at the Rio Grande Campus in 1974. In 1975, an oil painting course was offered and the department began to grow. In 1981, Minnie Miles was employed to build a Fine Arts department at the Ridgeview Campus. The unified department is now in effect, college-wide, and the enrollment of students in Fine Arts Department for the Fall semester '88 is over 600.

The strength of the department lies in the eagerness, optimism, dedication, and high quality of instruction. The instructors inspire a zest for learning and production. The students' work is exhibited daily in showcases of the ACC campuses, libraries, and in Annual Student Exhibits for public viewing. For two consecutive years Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. in Austin has exhibited works by ACC students.

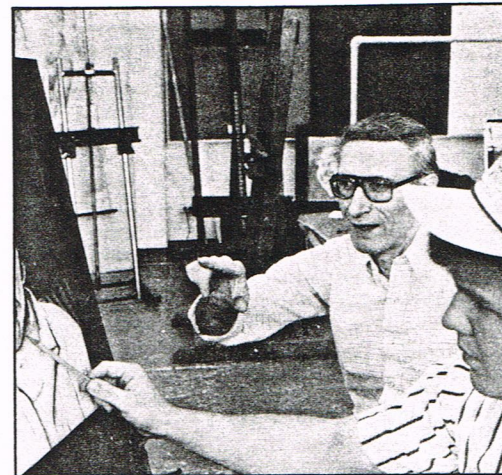
Other advantages to the students are field trips to museums and professional exhibits arranged by the department. We were also recently funded to offer the opportunity for local guest-lecturer/artists to visit our classes and for the students to visit their studios. Although permanent gallery space is not available, Fine Arts Faculty Art Shows has been on public exhibit. There is also an active Fine Arts Students' Art Club sponsored by David Wahlgren. The students become involved with the community as a means of introducing them to the important relationship between artist, audience, and community.

Although the majority of the students in the Fine Arts classes are of Anglo heritage, there are Hispanic, Afro-American, British, Vietnamese, Belgian, German, South American, Lebanese, American Indian, Oriental, and Iranian students ranging in ages from 19 to the past 70.

While instructors do not tolerate slack in work or study habits, there is companionable ease in the classroom. The truly basic "art of living" is practiced in these relaxed cordial learning situations. Many unexpected classroom incidents lend a humanistic flavor to the common task at hand.

For example, one instructor's classes have a humming chorus of pigeons (from the roof above) for background accompaniment to their classroom activity.

Another instructor, in an introduction to Visual Arts course, lectured on the personal and artistic struggles of Van Gogh. So touching was her story that one empathizing student commented very seriously, "He needed a dog." (The class laughter was the concession that it might have helped.)



David Wahlgren (Instructor and sponsor of the Fine Arts Students' Art Club) with an ACC student.

"Throwing" plastic molds in one instructor's sculpture class is reported as an interesting topic for conversation, bringing friendly hilarity to the otherwise studious atmosphere.

Or there was the break in an Art History class for the discussion, "How to Diaper a Baby".

The major weakness of our department is the lack of space. This has been a constant petition for years, seven to be exact. Hopefully, our new department unity will bring more recognized attention to this request. This is also a major issue to be presented to the Fine Arts Task Force.

However, in spite of limitations in facilities, students enjoy and profit from their classes. Fine Arts majors and advanced students have a foundation that will successfully carry them through more advanced studies as they transfer to four-year colleges and universities. When they leave the ACC Fine Arts department, they leave with pride and confidence.

In fact, some students have expressed amazement at the excellent quality of instruction they received from a "community college".

Former ACC students are doing well at the Cornish School of Art, Memphis College of Art, California College of Arts and Crafts, the University of North Texas, Southwest University and New Mexico State University. Many remain to attend the University of Texas, and are successfully meeting the challenge of further instruction.

Optimism prevails despite the fact that we still lack much-needed space. I would also like to have more part-time instructors become full-time, and to be able to arrange block-time schedules for instructors as far in advance as possible.

ACC will be only 17 years old in 1989. The college is growing, the Fine Arts department is growing, and the growing needs will be met.