



STEVEN GIBBONS

Nicole Gibbs works on a sculpture at Oregon School of Art and Craft, where she's learning skills to enhance her career as a working artist.

Learning what it means to be an artist

By **STEPHEN TEATER**

SPECIAL WRITER

Nicole Gibbs already had a bachelor's degree in painting and art history when she decided to pursue a certificate in craft at the **Oregon College of Art and Craft** in Portland.

Despite her liberal arts degree, "I had no idea what it meant to be an artist, how to get my work in a gallery — how to pursue that path," Gibbs said. "My goal was to learn a new media area and to prepare a body of work."

And that's what arts schools are for — preparing students for a career as a working artist, whether in the visual arts, performance arts, or culinary arts and hospitality.

"We're very career-focused," said Katie Silver, associate director of admissions for the **Art Institute of Portland**, which offers programs such as graphic design, apparel design,

interior design, digital film and video, animation and advertising.

"While we're not a trade school, the classroom environment really simulates what a student would experience in the real world," Silver said, so students "are leaving with their degree and also a portfolio that's strong enough to allow them to work in the industry."

Although many students attend art school right after graduating from high school, "It's a real mix," said Silver.

"We have career-changers, we have people already working in the industry who want to move to a different part of the industry, second bachelor's (degree) students," Silver said. "The student body — while it's not huge — is very diverse, and you just never know what you're going to learn from the person sitting next to you."

Because the curriculum at arts schools is job-specific, the majority of courses will be hands-

on and career-related. However, "the state requires 22 credits of English or writing-based classes," said Jennifer White, president of the **Western Culinary Institute**. "There is also a computer class, a communications class, and a math class. We're a professional-based college and we're looking to educate (students), not just train them."

Arts schools work to keep coursework relevant to the degree. For example, "you can teach fractions by talking about pies," White said.

Students generally have good success finding work after graduation. "Most programs have an internship built into the major in the senior year, which is the best way to transition into a job," said Silver.

Students can expect the length of an arts-school program to run anywhere from 15

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months (for an associate degree) to three or four years (for a bachelor's degree). Returning students who hold prior degrees don't usually need to take the core-education classes, and can graduate in a shorter amount of time, White said.

The cost to attend an arts school is comparable to that of a private college or university. "We are a private school," said White, "so the private school prices come from smaller class sizes and the very, very personal attention."

A student's materials and supplies may be included in the overall cost. For example, at Western Culinary, tuition includes "all of your knives, pastry tips, spatulas, ladles, your uniform — everything," said White. "The only things they have to supply are spiral notebooks, pens and pencils." Students at accredited schools also have access to the federal student aid.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Average cost: Depends on the program and the school, though often comparable to a private four-year institution — from around \$15,000 to \$24,000. Often the tuition includes fees, books and tool expenses.

Length and content of curriculum: Length is highly variable, though programs typically range from one to three years. On average, 70 percent of the curriculum is art classes and 30 percent of the curriculum is general-education classes.

Schedule: Depends on the program. Morning, afternoon, evening and weekend classes are usually available on either a part- or full-time schedule (although full-time attendance is often encouraged).

Degrees offered: Bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, certificates, diplomas.

Admission requirements: Interview and high school diploma required (GED accepted); SAT/ACT not typically required; institutional exam usually used for admission.

Admission considerations: Character/personality qualities, talent/ability, student portfolio, historical academic performance.

Admission deadlines: Varies by school.

Housing & campus life: Typically commuter campuses, although some schools offer limited off-campus, school-run housing; sports, clubs and activities are generally limited and usually organized outside regular school time by students and related to course content; students on campus typically range in age from recent high school graduates to working professionals returning to school for a different degree.

lio of work for a visual arts program, or auditioning for a performance arts program. For high school applicants who need to build a portfolio, the Oregon College of Art and Craft recommends taking introductory drawing classes at a community college or arts organization.

Prospective students for the Oregon College of Art and Craft and the **Pacific Northwest College of Art** can also apply in person at National Portfolio Day, which will be held in Portland at PNCA on Jan. 6. (A time has not yet been set; for more information, go to www.npda.org.)

Beyond merit, much of gaining admission to an arts school hinges on the student demonstrating a strong desire for a career in the arts.

"So many of these students are career-changers," said White, "they've already spent years doing something that they thought they were supposed to do. Now they're finally doing what they want to do."

Typically, arts schools do not provide on-campus housing, but "our student services (department) is very active in helping students find roommates, housing, moving services — the whole thing," said Debra Spencer, director of admissions at the Oregon College of Art and Craft, which offers fine arts and crafts programs.

Many schools, including the Art Institute of Portland, have school-sponsored housing lo-

cated close to campus.

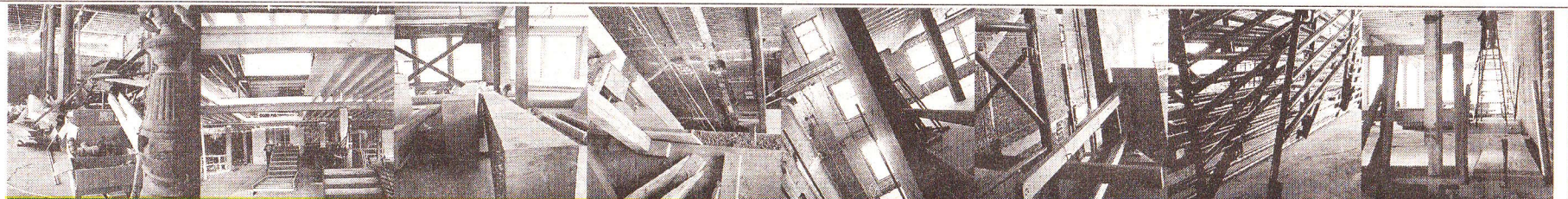
Creative community

Perhaps the greatest resource that arts schools have to offer is their population of artists — students and teachers alike. Campus life and social events vary from school to school, but clubs and activities tend to be student-run, art-related and abundant, which offers students the opportunity to completely immerse themselves in a community of creative

thinkers.

"Being able to develop a personal voice in the midst of other students and faculty who are often doing the same thing themselves," Gibbs said. "I don't think I could have done it in the vacuum of my own home studio."

The admissions process usually involves interviewing with an admissions counselor, submitting transcripts and in some cases, submitting a portfo-



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