Fairfax Magnet Center for Visual Arts

Program Description

March, 2009   v.1.0

I. Overview

The Fairfax Magnet Center for Visual Arts, located on the campus of Fairfax High School, is the visual arts magnet high school for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Students are drawn from all 700 square miles of LAUSD and apply through the magnet selection process – they are not screened for artistic talent or academic ability.

The Visual Arts Magnet’s curriculum fuses art and academics. Every semester students are required to take an art class, and they study art history for 12 weeks in 9th grade.

Art also plays a role in the Visual Arts Magnet’s academic classes, both for instruction and assessment.

The Visual Arts Magnet offers an art-oriented high school experience rather than a conservatory education. Some of our graduates will major in art and become professional artists; all will be offered the life-enriching experience of learning about and making art. To this end, the Visual Arts Magnet arranges field trips to museums and performances. We have relationships with museums and other nonprofit organizations that allow us to offer our students art-related extracurricular opportunities.

The capacity of the Visual Arts Magnet will expand to 378 students for the 2009-10 school year. The staff includes 12 classroom teachers (four in Art, four in English, two in Social Studies, one in Science and one in Mathematics), a counselor, the magnet coordinator, and an office technician.

The ethic breakdown for 2008-09 is 10% Asian, 2.2% Filipino, 10% Black, 69.4% Hispanic and 8.3% White. For 2008-09, 83% of Visual Arts Magnet students are eligible for the federal free and reduced price lunch program.

Mission

The Visual Arts Magnet offers an art-centered academically rigorous education; its students are encouraged to develop their curiosity and become self-motivated, lifelong learners – prepared for higher education, work, and the responsibilities of citizenship and adulthood.
Vision

Artists have a responsibility to know about the world around them. If a work of art is to have depth and resonance, it has to be about something. Young artists must learn to work in various media, but the education of artists is fundamentally about teaching them to see, and a person who knows literature, history, geography, nature, and mathematics sees differently than one who does not.

Our goal is to prepare all students for four-year college after graduation, whether they major in art or another field. To that end, we offer rigorous instruction in art and academics.

The Visual Arts Magnet is a small community whose members are mutually supportive and treat each other with respect, committed to the common enterprise of artistic and academic exploration.

II. Educational Philosophy

The California Content Standards define what it means to be an educated person, and we believe that an education is more important than ever to find one’s place in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

We believe that art is a mode of inquiry as well as aesthetic expression; it allows us to make sense of our experience and pose questions when words fail.

We believe that making art, and viewing art others have made, can be a transformative experience and that students’ lives and learning are enriched by art.

We believe that all students should, in addition to developing academic competence, develop their capacity for personal expression.

We believe that academic communities can foster growth for all their members and that students and faculty have a responsibility to do everything possible to help the community succeed.

The role of artists has evolved through the centuries: defining the sacred; presenting idealized visions of the rich and powerful; translating the magnificent subtleties of nature and humanity to two and three dimensions; documenting the complexities and contradictions of society and the challenges people face in their lives; and exploring perception and the boundaries of language and form.

Students at the Visual Arts Magnet appreciate art by making art, both in their studio and academic classes; they also study contemporary art and what has been created in the past.

Our priority is to prepare students to enter four-year colleges, whether they major in art or another academic field.
III. Differentiated Objectives of the Program

Students at the Visual Arts Magnet take an art class every semester, beginning with our foundation classes in 9th (Drawing 1A and Digital Imaging A) and 10th (Sculpture 1A and Photography 1A) grade. In 11th and 12th grade, students take advanced art classes in the fields that interest them.

All 9th graders take twelve weeks of Art History as part of our First Period program, which divides the year into three modules (Life Skills, Health and Art History) rather than two semesters.

Art is also used in academic classes, both to enrich instruction and vary assessment.

Magnet students must be enrolled in at least three magnet classes per semester. At the Visual Arts Magnet, the magnet classes by grade level are as follows:

**Freshman Year**

Most freshmen take four magnet classes, and some take five.

- English 9AB (Regular and Honors)
- Biology AB (Regular and Honors)
- Drawing 1A (one semester) and Digital Imaging A (one semester)
- Period One Program (Life Skills, Health and Art History)
- Algebra 1AB/Geometry AB (two sections of each)

(Students take the math class for which they qualify; math classes beyond Geometry are taught in the comprehensive high school. Foreign language and physical education classes are taught in the comprehensive high school. Two-period remedial courses in English and Mathematics are available to students who need them.)

**Sophomore Year**

Most sophomores take three magnet classes, and some take four.

- English 10AB (Regular and Honors)
- World History AB (Regular and Honors)
- Sculpture 1A (one semester) and Photography 1A (one semester)
- Geometry AB (two sections)

(AP World History is available in the comprehensive high school for students who qualify and apply.)
Junior Year
Some juniors take three magnet classes, and some take four.

American Literature/Contemporary Composition (Regular and Honors)
U.S. History AB (Regular and Honors)
Advanced art classes
Chemistry AB

(AP U.S. History, AP English Language and Composition and A.P. Chemistry are available in the comprehensive high school for students who qualify and apply.)

Senior Year
Most seniors take three magnet classes.

12th Grade English (Regular and Honors)
U.S. Government/Economics (Regular and Honors)
Advanced art classes

(AP English Literature, AP Government, AP Biology, AP Calculus, AP Statistics, AP Physics and AP Spanish are available in the comprehensive high school for students who qualify and apply.)

Courses By Department
Magnet classes differ from comprehensive high school classes covering the same standards. Department by department, and course by course, the differences are as follows:

English
In addition to teaching a rigorous, standards-based curriculum, the Visual Arts Magnet’s English classes aspire to cumulative coherence through the four years of our program and include art, for instruction and assessment, whenever possible.

English 9AB
Since our students read Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 10th grade English, our 9th grade teachers added *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to their curricula. 9th grade English students also read Chaim Potok’s *My Name is Asher Lev*, about a young artistic prodigy in a Hasidic Jewish community in Post-World War II Brooklyn. All 9th graders meet during the First Period Program for a lecture on the art historical aspects of the novel. For enhanced understanding (and assessment), students read and analyze literary works and interpret them visually in “open mind” diagrams and both single and multiple panel drawings. They create postcards or Valentine’s Day cards from one character to another
English 10AB

*Huck Finn* was added to the curriculum in part because of its relevance to a key scene in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, which is taught in the honors 11th grade classes. Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic narrative, *Maus*, is taught both because of its innovative approach to storytelling and its cross-curricular relevance to the World History curriculum. The Honors 10 class reads *Othello* to prepare for Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis’ *Dom Casmurro* – based on Shakespeare’s play – which they’ll read in Honors 12th grade English. Sophomores, among other art projects, create *papier mâché* masks with word collages – representing the state of mind of a character – in response to the literature they read.

American Literature/Contemporary Composition

In 11th grade English classes, students create art in response to literature, and art is used to illuminate works as they read. In teaching Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, for example, seeing the Booker T. Washington sculpture at Tuskegee and Jacob Lawrence’s painting, *Dancing Doll*, enhance students’ understanding of key passages in the novel.

12th Grade English

In Honors Advanced Composition, students read Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, an autobiographical graphic narrative about her childhood in Iran. Students adapt a first person narrative to graphic form and, through watching several films (Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, Keaton’s *The General*, Sturges’ *Sullivan’s Travels*, Donen and Kelly’s *Singin’ in the Rain*, Tati’s *Mon Oncle* and Lane’s *Sidewalk Stories*) explore the boundary of telling stories with words and through images.

Social Studies

In addition to teaching a rigorous, standards-based curriculum, the Visual Arts Magnet’s social studies classes use art, for instruction and assessment, whenever possible.

World History AB

Students create a magazine set in an historical era and sculptures of famous buildings. They also do a “cluster diagram” project and visual interpretations of Enlightenment philosophers.

U.S. History AB

In studying World War I and World War II, students are shown posters from the eras and create their own using specific propaganda criteria. For the Westward Expansion, they create a book, a board game, a puzzle or a mobile. For the “Decades Project,” students create a scrapbook, a newspaper or a magazine. For book reports, students create a children’s book, book jackets, illustrated postcards, illustrated timelines, newspapers or dioramas.
U.S. Government/Economics
In U.S. Government, students create political posters, buttons, stamps, bumper stickers and brochures. In Economics, they design packaging and an advertising campaign. They also design new currency.

Science
In addition to teaching a rigorous, standards-based curriculum, the Visual Arts Magnet’s science classes use art, for instruction and assessment, whenever possible.

Biology AB
In studying comparative anatomy and organ systems, students create three-dimensional scale models of the human heart (2:1) and digestive system (1:1). They also make anatomically correct models of a shrimp, a turtle and a coral polyp. In studying ecosystems, students make a miniature model of a rocky seashore, including flora and fauna. In studying genetics, students create a family portrait of theoretical organisms based on genotypes, phenotypes and the relationship between alleles.

Chemistry AB
At this time, no art projects are included in this course.

Mathematics
In addition to teaching a rigorous, standards-based curriculum, the Visual Arts Magnet’s mathematics classes use art, for instruction and assessment, whenever possible.

Algebra 1AB
Students use pictorial representations of equations and systems of equations. For example 3x +2y+4x+6y might look like 3 (picture of cat) + 2 (picture of house) +4 (picture of cat) +6 (picture of house) to illustrate what it means to combine like terms. In systems of equations if there are yodelers and xylophones we draw pictures of yodelers holding xylophones to solve the system.

Geometry AB
In the section on transformations, students draw tessellations using rotations, translations and reflections to make pictures that are beautiful yet require a lot of hands-on math. Properties of circles are used to create inscribed shapes that are then colored. The coloring lends itself to a discussion about the minimum number of colors to use so that no two adjacent shapes are the same color. The drawing of the circles requires the use of a compass and straightedge; students build polyhedron shapes, prisms and pyramids. The class explores the geometry found in the world and how geometry can be used to interpret nature.
The Period One Program

At the Visual Arts Magnet, 9th graders are enrolled in a special program during first period. While their transcripts will show that they completed a semester of Life Skills and a semester of Health, they are actually enrolled in three modules of equal length: Life Skills, Health and Art History. To fully cover the Health curriculum, nutrition is covered in Life Skills.

The Art History module introduces great art of the past from many cultures, aesthetic theory, and art criticism. It also explores careers in art and the connections of art and academics.

Studio Art

Studio art classes are the heart of the program at the Visual Arts Magnet. In addition to the hands-on experience of making art, students are regularly exposed to art history and the elements and principles of design. The Visual Arts Magnet is a foundation program, providing students a well-rounded experience in various two and three-dimensional media before they specialize. The art departments at UCLA and USC also follow this foundation model.

Foundation Classes (9th and 10th Grade)

Drawing 1A (9th) — This course gives students an experience with the basic art materials and techniques needed to develop skills in drawing. Areas of emphasis include ink, pastel, perspective, and pointillism. This course introduces the elements of design and provides the opportunity to develop individual expression and style through drawing.

Digital Imaging A (9th) — Instruction begins with an introduction to the Macintosh computer interface. Students use AppleWorks for digital painting, drawing, and word processing. The principles of design are introduced, as well as Adobe Photoshop software. The lab is equipped with G5 Macintosh computers.

Sculpture 1A (10th) — This course explores three-dimensional design and sculptural techniques. Students gain hands-on experience in a variety of media, including clay, wire, metal, plaster, fabric, and papier mâché.

Photography 1A (10th) — This course begins with basic concepts and progresses towards a full understanding of the camera. Practical, working knowledge of film processing and darkroom procedures are explained. In addition, emphasis is placed on individual creative development, encouraging students to express their unique and personal ideas.
Advanced Art Classes (11th and 12th Grade)

The following courses are offered for one or two semesters. An asterisk (*) indicates that advanced coursework for an additional year is offered with approval of the teacher and counselor.

**Ceramics** — Students are introduced to clay as a creative and functional art medium. Forming, glazing, and firing procedures are covered. Students concentrate both on hand-building and wheel-throwing techniques.

**Digital Imaging B** — Students begin with image processing, using Adobe PhotoShop software. Topics include adjusting photos, retouching, collage, and layout.

**Drawing 1B** — In this class, students apply basic drawing skills to intermediate and advanced drawing projects. Additional emphasis is placed on expression of emotion and opinion through art.

**Painting 1A** — This course covers the basic use of color and brush technique. Students learn about various painting methods used throughout history. They also have the opportunity to develop and use their own style in the creation of original artwork.

**Photography** — Advanced skills and techniques are the focus of this course. The students will learn portrait lighting, solarization, double exposure and the Kodalith process. They continue to work on projects expressing their own individual vision. A.P. Photography is offered every other year.

**Advanced Placement (A.P.) Studio Art** — A one-year class for seniors. This course enables a student to create a substantial portfolio of work and, after evaluation by the College Board, possibly receive college credit. A.P. Studio Art is available in the three portfolio areas offered by the College Board.

IV. Expectations of Student Performance

Many of our graduates will work in art-related fields, including film, television, web graphics, advertising and design. These industries have matured to the point where young people who can draw are no longer being hired off the street. John Hughes, the principal of Rhythm ‘n Hues Studios, an Academy Award winning animation and special effects house, stated in 1999 that his company only hired artists with MFA degrees. He minimized the importance of familiarity with specific software packages, as technology changes so quickly. His company wanted trained artists who were educated people – who could read and think. He lamented that only one of every 150 resumes he received was from a qualified applicant and that half of the qualified applicants were from outside the United States. He urged American schools to produce graduates he could hire.
Attendance

For the 2006-07 school year, student attendance was 96.01%. For 2007-08, it was 96.20%. These are among the highest rates of attendance in LAUSD.

Standardized Test Data

Over the past decade, the Visual Arts Magnet has paid careful attention to its standardized test data, which has helped us to understand our students and their academic needs. Annually, we create spreadsheets to view our data. The current spreadsheets may be found in the “Data” section of our website, (www.lausd.net/Fairfax_Magnet_HS)

Our goal is for all of our students to be proficient or advanced on the California Standards Tests, which are administered annually to students in grades 9-11. Our 2008 CST results were:

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<th>Subject</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Below Basic</th>
<th>Far Below Basic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English (9th)</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
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<td>13.4</td>
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<td>44.6</td>
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<td>23.9</td>
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<td>39.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>28.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry (10th)</td>
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<td>8.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>41.9</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Algebra 2 (11th)</td>
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<td>8.1</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In every case, our numbers are substantially higher than LAUSD’s and in almost every case higher than the state average.

Unfortunately, our students’ mathematics achievement is terrible. What jumps out from the data – for our program, LAUSD and the state – is the extent to which the grade in which one takes a math class predicts CST results. 9th graders do poorly on the CST for Algebra I. On the other hand, 9th graders do better on the CSTs for Geometry and Algebra II than do 10th and 11th graders. This is not a surprise, and it suggests that middle schools are properly identifying and programming their more adept math students.
On last year’s CST, 78 of our 9th graders were tested in Algebra I, 25 in Geometry, and 10 in Algebra II. These numbers include “demotes,” students who are not true 9th graders because they have not earned enough credits to be promoted to 10th grade.

High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

Since the exam was introduced, approximately 90% of Visual Arts Magnet students have passed both the language arts and mathematics sections on their first attempt. It is extremely rare that a student fails to graduate due to not passing the CAHSEE. 100% of the Visual Arts Magnet’s Class of 2008 passed the CAHSEE.

Graduation Rate

Calculation of graduation rate is controversial given the limitations of our systems for tracking data for a highly mobile student population.

Graduation rate, like CST test scores, is also a function of the students that enter each high school as 9th graders. A recent study by the Latino Scorecard Education Action Team, conducted by researchers at UCLA, provided interesting insight to the success of lower achieving students enrolled at the Visual Arts Magnet. The report may be found at www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/LSEAT

Part of the study examined the effect of small schools on student achievement. The focus was first time 9th graders entering in September, 2001 and whether they graduated on time in June, 2005. The Visual Arts Magnet was mentioned in two of the four categories of students that were studied.

The first group was 9th graders who tested as Below Basic or Far Below Basic on either the CST Language Arts or CST Math. 49 of 84 of our 9th graders that year were in this category. In LAUSD as a whole, only 46% of these students graduated on time; here at the Visual Arts Magnet, 82% graduated on time.

The second group was 9th graders who had two to six Ds and Fails in middle school. 40 of 84 Visual Arts Magnet 9th graders were in this category. In LAUSD as a whole, only 55% of these students graduated on time; here at the Visual Arts Magnet, 83% graduated on time.

This report shows that low-achieving students are far more likely to graduate at the Visual Arts Magnet than at other schools. These students may not test as proficient or advanced on the CST exams, particularly math, but they pass the CAHSEE, stay in school, and mostly earn a high school diploma on time.
College Acceptances

College admissions vary from year to year, but the Class of 2008 was, by far, our most successful ever, with 38 of 77 graduates accepted to four-year colleges, including 25 by the University of California. Nine enrolled at UCLA, two at USC and one at New York University.

V. Multicultural Activities/Curriculum

Our small community is multicultural, and through four years the students become like siblings. They have classes together and see each other in various academic, artistic and social contexts. Shared interests, tastes (music, film, etc.) become more important than ethnicity.

In our classes, students read literature and view art from many cultures, and multiple perspectives are valued. The 12th grade Great Books class focuses on multicultural literature.

VI. Special Curriculum

The curriculum of the Visual Arts Magnet is centered on the art elective students take each semester for four years. As described above, art is also infused in our academic classes.

Artists are hired based on the portfolios they present to prospective clients/employers. To prepare students for the realities of the art world, the Magnet requires them to create a portfolio of artwork made during their four years. The portfolios are kept in the Magnet Office, and students must contribute two pieces of art from each foundation and advanced art class they take, along with four pieces of art created for academic classes. They are encouraged to supplement their portfolios with additional work. Each work must be properly formatted and titled. Students must prepare a commentary for each piece, including why it was selected for inclusion, what media were used, and their feelings about the work.
VII. Special Enrichment Activities

The Magnet organizes at least six field trips per year, mostly to museums and galleries, including the Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the UCLA/Fowler Museum, the UCLA/Hammer Museum, the Norton Simon Museum, the Huntington Library, the Japanese American National Museum, the Museum of Tolerance, the Armory Center for the Arts and Bergamot Station.

For many years, we have sent 60-150 students to plays and other performance at the Music Center. We send students to at least two productions per year – a wonderful opportunity to experience topnotch professional theater.

We have done several field trips that combine art (drawing/photography) and science.

Magnet students have participated in internships with the Education Department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and in the LACMA Lab/Boone Children’s Gallery.

Every other year, one of our art teachers organizes a large Chalk Art Festival in the spring, in which groups of students create designs on the upper quadrangle. The teacher also organizes a summer trip to Chalk It Up in Pasadena, the world’s largest chalk art festival.

For many years, Magnet students have created and repaired murals on the Fairfax campus. Work is usually done after the Advanced Placement portfolio is completed for A.P. Studio Art.

For a number of years, our sculpture and ceramics teacher has taken a group of Magnet students to Clay Day at Cal State Northridge, where they have received many awards.

Visual Arts Magnet students lead several school clubs, including Latino Student Union, Filipino Student Union, Black Student Union, Unity Club, KIWINS, and Planeteers. They have also participated in Academic Decathlon and Mock Trial and gone to Washington, DC with Close Up.

Visual Arts Magnet students participate in a variety of programs offered by the professional theater on our campus, Greenway Arts Alliance, as well as programs presented by YouThink, the Constitutional Rights Foundation and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles.

To meet the community service graduation requirement, many Visual Arts Magnet students volunteer as student poll workers.

Through the years, the Magnet has hosted a number of guest artists, including Robbie Conal and Gary Baseman.
The Magnet also presents representatives from art colleges and art departments at universities, including USC, UCLA, CalArts, Otis College of Art and Design, the schools of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago. We have been active in helping students gain admission to USC and CalArts.

The Magnet Senior Banquet is much anticipated every year – an opportunity to spend an evening together prior to graduation.

The Magnet recently held its first annual t-shirt design contest.

**VIII. Parent and Community Involvement**

The Visual Arts Magnet conducts a 9th grade orientation for incoming families every August.

The Magnet Coordinators attend as many recruitment events as possible – to meet prospective students and parents and inform them about our program. As the application season approaches, we schedule visits for families that contact us. We do not give tours at particular times; we prefer that families visit at a time that is convenient and see our program on a regular school day.

We have Back-to-School Night, Open House and two PHBAO conferences per year.

A conscious effort has been made to make the Magnet Office welcoming to parents, who know that we quickly respond to their concerns – and that they don’t have to wait for scheduled parent conferences to be in touch.