

NEW ORLEANS CENTER FOR CREATIVE ARTS  
SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND COMMISSIONS



FINANCIAL AUDIT SERVICES  
INFORMATIONAL REPORT  
ISSUED SEPTEMBER 30, 2015

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LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR  
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

September 30, 2015

The Honorable John A. Alario, Jr.,  
President of the Senate  
The Honorable Charles E. "Chuck" Kleckley,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Mr. Kyle Wedberg, Chief Executive Officer  
New Orleans Center for Creative Arts

Dear Senator Alario, Representative Kleckley, and Mr. Wedberg:

This report provides the results of our review of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). The purpose of this review was to evaluate student enrollment, funding, and the results achieved at NOCCA for the period from July 1, 2013, through June 30, 2015. The scope of our report was significantly less than an audit conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*. I hope this report will benefit you in your legislative and operational decision-making processes.

We would like to express our appreciation to the management and staff of NOCCA for their assistance during our work.

Sincerely,

Daryl G. Purpera, CPA, CFE  
Legislative Auditor

JMJ:AD:WDG:EFS:ch

NOCCA 2015



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# Louisiana Legislative Auditor

Daryl G. Purpera, CPA, CFE



New Orleans Center for Creative Arts  
Special Schools and Commissions

September 2015

Audit Control # 80150032

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## Introduction

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) is a state agency and public high school that offers qualified students two programs:

- *Academic Studio* - full day, diploma-granting, college preparatory four-year program for arts students
- *Arts Program* - provides half-day or after-school training in the disciplines of Classical Instrumental, Creative Writing, Culinary Arts, Dance, Drama, Jazz, Media Arts: Filmmaking and Audio Production, Musical Theater, Theater Design, Visual Arts, and Vocal Music

### **NOCCA's Mission:**

*To provide professional arts training, coaching, and performance opportunities for high school level students who aspire to be creative artists.*

The purpose of this report was to evaluate student enrollment, funding, and the results achieved at NOCCA. Overall, we found:

- For the 2014-15 school year, 636 students from 15 different parishes attended NOCCA programs. The Academic Studio experienced a 37% increase in enrollment over the prior year due to the addition of NOCCA's first senior class.
- NOCCA is funded through state General Fund and state Minimum Foundation Formula (MFP) funds. NOCCA received a significant increase in MFP funds for fiscal year 2015 because of the increase in enrollment to the Academic Studio program and a change in the funding allocation.
- NOCCA received a letter grade of "A" and a School Performance Score of 120.4 from the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for the 2013-14 school year. Only 14 of 148 (9.5%) high schools in Louisiana received an "A" letter grade. NOCCA was also designated as a 2014-16 Exemplary School by the Arts School Network.

See Appendix A for management's response, Appendix B for our scope and methodology, and Appendix C for additional background information about NOCCA.



## Objective: Evaluate student enrollment, funding, and results achieved at NOCCA

We conducted procedures at NOCCA to gain an understanding of student enrollment, analyze funding and expenditures, and consider results achieved compared to state and national performance. Our results are described below.

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**For the 2014-15 school year, the Academic Studio showed a 37% increase over prior-school-year enrollment. NOCCA reached beyond New Orleans to attract students from 15 parishes.**

Students apply and are admitted to NOCCA through an audition process. During the 2014-15 school year, 636 students were enrolled at NOCCA. Of those students, 242 attended NOCCA's Academic Studio full-time, and 394 individuals attended NOCCA's arts training part-time. The Academic Studio enrollment increased by 37%, or 65 students, over the prior school year due to the addition of NOCCA's first senior class.

### *Academic Studio*

The Academic Studio is NOCCA's full-day, diploma-granting high school for its art students. Due to the structure of the curriculum, academic students must begin in the ninth grade and continue through the twelfth grade. The first senior class graduation of NOCCA's Academic Studio was in May 2015, with all 44 academic seniors graduating, a 100% graduation rate. For more detail on the Academic Studio and its curriculum, see Appendix D.

### *Arts Program*

For the Arts program, high school students from public, private, parochial, and home schools attend NOCCA Monday through Friday either half a day or after school. All students are in one of the following arts disciplines:<sup>1</sup> Classical Instrumental, Creative Writing, Culinary Arts, Dance, Drama, Jazz, Media Arts: Filmmaking and Audio Production, Musical Theater, Theater Design, Visual Arts, and Vocal Music.

### *Students from 15 Parishes*

For the 2014-15 school year, students came from Orleans, Jefferson, and 13 surrounding parishes, as shown in Exhibit 1. Per NOCCA management, outreach to inform the public about enrollment opportunities is primarily through teachers in the school systems that are aware of NOCCA programs and refer talented students. Exhibits 1 and 2 break down NOCCA's enrollment by parish and art discipline, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Students earn elective credits upon successfully completing NOCCA art courses.

Exhibit 1 - Enrollment by Parish					
Parish	Student Count	Parish	Student Count	Parish	Student Count
Ascension	7	Livingston	1	St. James	2
Assumption	1	Orleans	258	St. John	11
East Baton Rouge	3	Plaquemines	6	St. Tammany	115
Jefferson	192	St. Bernard	14	Tangipahoa	5
Lafourche	2	St. Charles	18	Terrebonne	1
<b>Total Students</b>					<b>636</b>
<b>Source:</b> 2014-15 October 1 <sup>st</sup> Enrollment Statistics provided by NOCCA administration.					

Exhibit 2 - Enrollment by Art Discipline			
Discipline	Full-Time Academic Studio	Part-Time Arts-Only	Total Students
Classical Instrumental	3	16	19
Creative Writing	20	27	47
Culinary Arts	16	10	26
Dance	27	53	80
Drama	24	29	53
Jazz Instrumental	23	23	46
Media Arts	24	53	77
Musical Theatre	39	67	106
Theatre Design	17	6	23
Visual Arts	34	90	124
Vocal Music	15	20	35
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>636</b>
<b>Source:</b> 2014-15 October 1 <sup>st</sup> Enrollment Statistics provided by NOCCA administration			

**NOCCA is funded by state General Fund and state Minimum Foundation Formula (MFP) funds, with a significant increase in MFP funds for fiscal year 2015.**

Attendance is tuition-free to all Louisiana students who meet audition requirements and are enrolled in NOCCA. NOCCA is primarily operated with state funds, but some private funding is raised directly to assist students in need and provide for certain department and program costs.

#### *Public Funding*

As a state agency, NOCCA receives the majority of its funding through state appropriations. State General Fund direct appropriations totaled \$5,309,004 and \$5,654,254 for state fiscal years 2014 and 2015, respectively.

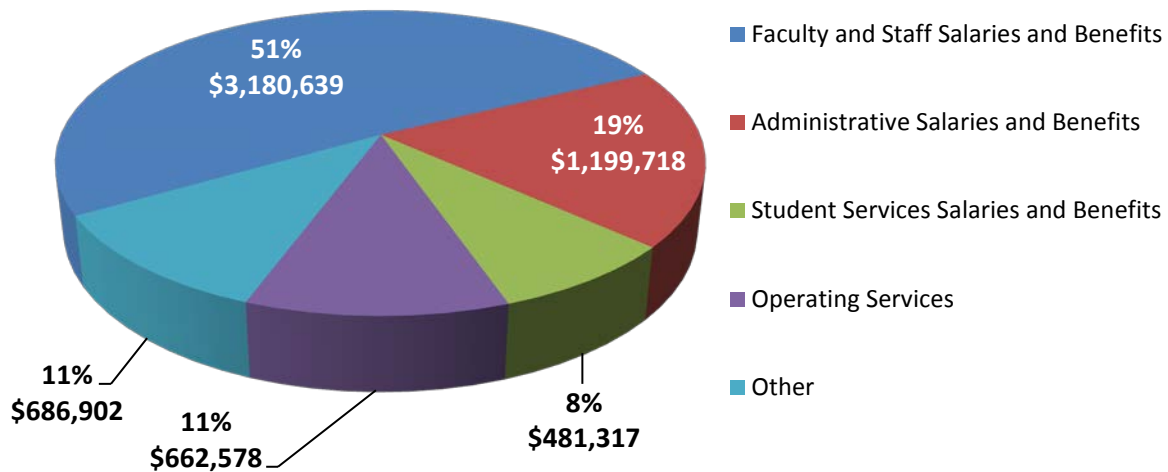


NOCCA also receives state MFP funds from the Louisiana Department of Education pursuant to the formula adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), which allocates education funds equitably statewide. NOCCA received \$902,150 and \$2,166,616 in state MFP funds for fiscal years 2014 and 2015, respectively. The 140% increase in fiscal year 2015 was partially because of the increase in full-time Academic Studio student enrollment. In addition, during fiscal year 2015 the MFP funding allocation changed, and NOCCA was funded with both a state and local allocation, which increased the per-student amount.

For fiscal years 2014 and 2015, NOCCA primarily used its funding for the purposes shown in Exhibits 3 and 4:

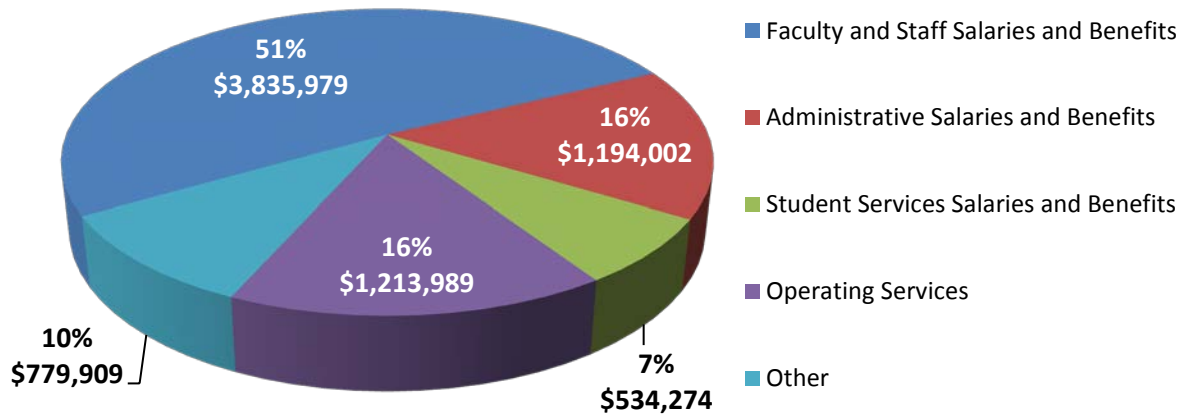
- Salaries and benefits (administrative, faculty and staff, and student services)
- Operating services
- Other (insurance, travel, training, supplies, security, capital outlay, and professional services)

**Exhibit 3 - Expenditures for Fiscal Year (FY) 2014**  
*Funding Utilization*  
*General Fund and MFP Expenditures for FY14*



Source: The state's Integrated Statewide Information System (ISIS)

**Exhibit 4 - Expenditures for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015**  
*Funding Utilization*  
**General Fund and MFP Expenditures for FY15**



Source: The state's Integrated Statewide Information System (ISIS)

*Private Funding*

In addition to state General Fund and MFP, NOCCA also receives support from The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Institute (the NOCCA Institute). The NOCCA Institute is a nonprofit organization whose purpose and intent is to support and promote NOCCA. The NOCCA Institute supports NOCCA by generating additional funding for NOCCA and NOCCA students. See Exhibit 5 for the NOCCA Institute’s contributions to NOCCA for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014.

<b>Exhibit 5 – NOCCA Institute Contributions to NOCCA</b>	
<b>Artists in Residence</b>	<b>\$86,305</b>
<b>Financial Aid to Students</b>	<b>224,540</b>
<b>NOCCA Department Support</b>	<b>104,787</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$415,632</b>
<b>Source: NOCCA Institute audit report for fiscal year ending June 30, 2014</b>	

The NOCCA Institute led a public-private partnership to redevelop the NOCCA Forum building for NOCCA. The building houses administrative, faculty, and staff offices as well as classrooms used for academic and arts instruction, a culinary studio, and a main hall for school events. The renovation was funded by Qualified Zone Academy Bonds through the Louisiana Department of Education, federal and state New Markets Tax Credits, federal and state Historic Tax Credits, and private donations through the NOCCA Institute. For more information about the NOCCA Institute, see Appendix E.

**NOCCA received a letter grade of an “A” and a School Performance Score of 120.4 from BESE for the 2013-14 school year. In addition, 92% of NOCCA students scored “good” or “excellent” on end-of-course tests.**

Despite its primary focus on the arts, NOCCA is subject to the same accountability standards as other high schools in Louisiana. This includes the school accountability grading and student participation in end-of-course testing.

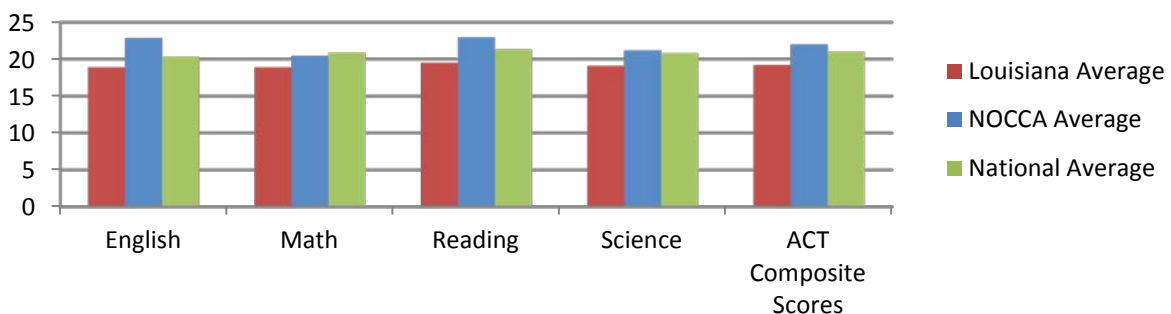
### *School Performance Grades*

NOCCA received a letter grade of “A” and a School Performance Score of 120.4 from BESE for the 2013-14 school year. Only 14 (9.5%) of 148 high schools in the state received an “A” letter grade. Louisiana’s overall statewide high school performance score was 89.2 and a “B” letter grade. The school grade is based on student achievement, graduation index, and graduation rate.

### *End-of-Course Tests and ACT Scores*

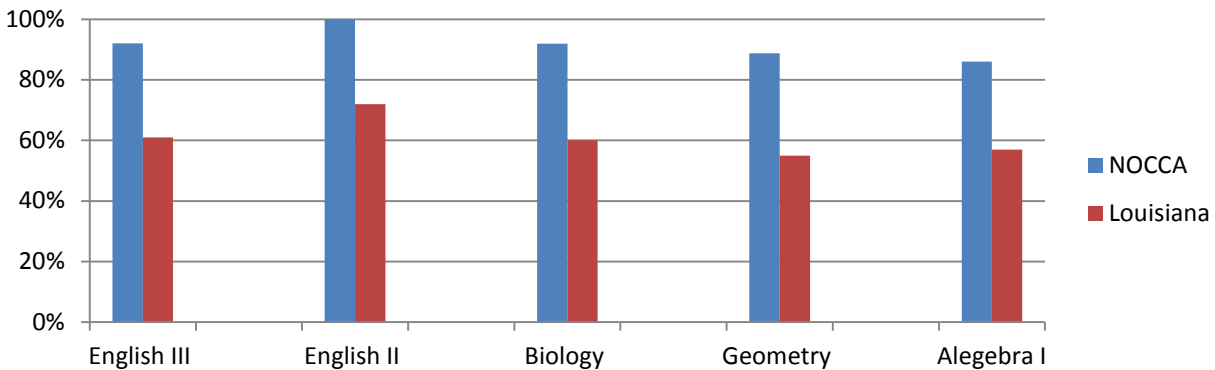
Academic Studio students are required to take the same end-of-course tests as other public high school students in Louisiana. For all NOCCA Academic Studio students, 92% scored good or excellent on the end-of-course tests for the 2013-2014 school year as compared to Louisiana students statewide, where 62% scored “good” or “excellent.” Academic Studio students also scored well on ACT scores when compared to the Louisiana average and the national average, as shown in Exhibits 6 and 7.

**Exhibit 6 - 2013-14 ACT Test Scores**



**Source:** NOCCA 2013-14 results provided by NOCCA Student Services - College and Accountability; ACT National and State Averages provided by ACT Inc. ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org))

**Exhibit 7 - 2013-14 End-of-Course Tests  
(Percentage Scoring “Excellent” or “Good”)**



**Source:** NOCCA 2013-14 results provided by NOCCA Student Services - College and Accountability; Department of Education ([www.louisianabelieves.com](http://www.louisianabelieves.com))

**In addition to TOPS scholarships earned by 82% of NOCCA graduates during the 2014-15 school year, an average of \$125,000 in other scholarships were offered per student by other institutions and programs. Overall, 96% of all graduates went on to college and conservatory programs across the country.**

While students are admitted to NOCCA based on their demonstrated arts talent, student academic achievement is also evident through earned scholarships, merit awards, grants, and national recognition.

### *TOPS Scholarships*

NOCCA’s full-time art students in the Academic Studio can graduate with eligibility for the state’s TOPS scholarships. There are different award components of the TOPS Program: TOPS Honors Award (ACT Score of 27+), TOPS Performance Award (ACT Score of 23+), and TOPS Opportunity Award (ACT Score of 20+). In school year 2014-15, students qualified for the following TOPS Awards:

- TOPS Honors Award (8 students)
- TOPS Performance Award (10 students)
- TOPS Opportunity Award (18 students)

Of the 44 graduating seniors, 36 (or 82%) qualified for TOPS. Per statistics from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance website,<sup>2</sup> approximately 50% of graduating seniors qualify for TOPS statewide.

### *Other Scholarships Earned*

From 2011 to 2015, 605 (96%) of NOCCA's 630 graduates went on to college or conservatory programs across the country. During this same timeframe, NOCCA students received merit awards, grants and/or scholarship offers totaling \$76,400,000 (exclusive of TOPS). Over the five-year period, the state directly appropriated \$25,391,431 of General Fund dollars, which NOCCA equates to a \$51,008,569 return on investment in scholarship offers. During the 2014-15 school year, NOCCA's students were awarded \$17,000,000 in scholarships. On average, \$125,000 in scholarships was offered per student by approximately 120 institutions or programs in 2015, as shown in Exhibit 8.

<b>Exhibit 8 - Graduate Tracking - Academic Years 2011 through 2015</b>					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b><i>University scholarships awarded/offered to students:</i></b>					
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13,000,000</b>	<b>\$14,500,000</b>	<b>\$14,500,000</b>	<b>\$17,400,000</b>	<b>\$17,000,000</b>
<b>Average awarded per student</b>	<b>\$101,563</b>	<b>\$115,079</b>	<b>\$117,886</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>
<b><i>Students' future academic plans:</i></b>					
Attend in-state college	59	60	51	40	61
Attend out-of-state college	64	59	66	74	68
Pursuing direct career	5	6	6	2	8
Other	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total*</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>137</b>
*Represents the total number of certificates issued by NOCCA to students for the respective academic year. NOCCA surveys all students completing its programs and reports all completing students' future academic plans. <b>Source:</b> NOCCA surveys of students and certificates issued statistics on file with NOCCA					

### *Other Recognition and Awards*

Each year, NOCCA students submit works of art and writings to Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, which is a national competition that recognizes students with an elite artistic aptitude. Students can submit works in 28 categories of art and writing that are reviewed by artistic and literary professionals. If the students' works are selected, they can win scholarships and have their works of art and writing exhibited and published by Scholastic. Three hundred thousand works of art and writing were submitted from students across America. Only the top 1% of the submissions was recognized at the national level. The works are judged based on those that best exemplified originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision.

<sup>2</sup> [www.osfa.louisiana.gov](http://www.osfa.louisiana.gov)

NOCCA student national recognitions from Scholastic Art and Writing in visual arts, media arts, and creative writing in 2015 included:

- Twenty-one percent of the 2015 senior class (29 of 137) was recognized with Scholastic awards.
- Six students received gold medals for the most outstanding work in the nation.
- Eight students received silver medals for works demonstrating high honors on the national level.
- Two students received silver medal portfolio awards (for graduating seniors only/works demonstrating high honors on the national level).
- One student received the silver medal with distinction portfolio award (for graduating seniors only/works demonstrating high honors on the national level).

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### **NOCCA was designated as a 2014-16 Exemplary School by the Arts Schools Network.**

The Exemplary School Designation honors a school's success in its commitment to excellence and quality instruction in arts education. Arts Schools Network is a professional membership organization of specialized arts schools, "dedicated to its mission to provide leaders in arts schools with quality resources support, and networking opportunities." ([www.artsschoolsnetwork.org](http://www.artsschoolsnetwork.org)) NOCCA was one of 19 schools nationwide to receive the Exemplary School Designation and only one of two schools in Louisiana.

## **APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE**





Louisiana Legislative Auditor,

Thank you for this opportunity to reintroduce NOCCA Louisiana's Arts Conservatory to our partners and stakeholders, especially those in Louisiana State Government. This report provides insight on what we do each and every day: provide world class public education to a group of young Louisianans that are the next generation of leaders in the creative and cultural economy.

I want to highlight and thank the Legislative Auditors for stepping out of their traditional reports and taking on this ambitious attempt to capture what is working well and functioning at the highest possible level in state government. NOCCA had completed every bi-annual report since becoming a state agency in FY2000 with a clean audit and no findings, ever. We are a solid agency that does extraordinary work as it relates to fiduciary stewardship and responsibility. This report gave the Legislative Auditor and by extension State Government Officials the opportunity to see some the impressive work of one of Louisiana's flagship agencies, especially in light of the budget cuts all agencies have had to absorb over the past decade.

NOCCA has seen 95-98% of each of its past eight graduating classes go on to attend college, conservatory or university. Over the past three years the total scholarships offered to the senior class has met or exceeded \$17M which is a per capita average of between \$125,000 and \$150,000 per student. The return on investment, in senior scholarship dollars offered alone is greater than 2:1. Meaning, for every dollar the state spent on NOCCA there were \$2 returned in scholarship offers to the senior class alone.

We share with all readers an invitation to visit and experience firsthand what is going on every day at NOCCA. We are proud of the work that is being done at NOCCA, the opportunities that students who attend NOCCA have after graduation and the efficacy and efficiency with which resources are managed. These attributes make this school a model state agency. It is a privilege for all of us to work at such a place and we hope that the State of Louisiana shares our pride in the extraordinary work of this agency.

In service,



Kyle Wedberg  
NOCCA President/CEO



## APPENDIX B: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We conducted procedures for this informational report to provide a better understanding of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). The scope of our procedures was significantly less than an audit conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*. The purpose of this report was to evaluate student enrollment, funding, and the results achieved at NOCCA.

To achieve our objectives, we reviewed relevant information and performed the following procedures:

- Interviewed NOCCA management and obtained information regarding NOCCA's operations, Academic Studio, and art programs.
- Interviewed NOCCA management and obtained and analyzed information regarding NOCCA's sources and uses of state and other funding.
- Obtained and analyzed NOCCA's expenditure transactions.
- Analyzed statewide performance results and high school graduate college enrollment data obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education's website.
- Toured the buildings located on NOCCA's main campus and the NOCCA Forum Building.



## APPENDIX C: BACKGROUND

NOCCA is located at 2800 Chartres Street on the Mississippi River near the New Orleans French Quarter. The campus consists of a 15-year-old main campus and the newly-renovated NOCCA Forum building. The campus includes classrooms, faculty and administrative offices, a fitness center, recital hall, jazz studio, culinary studio, and two theaters for art performances and presentations.

NOCCA, founded in 1973, was initially established under the Orleans Parish School Board by a coalition of artists, educators, business leaders, and community activists who saw the need for an institution devoted to the region's aspiring artists and performers.

Act 60 of the 2000 First Extraordinary Session established the NOCCA riverfront campus as a state agency effective July 1, 2000, under the state Special Schools and Commissions but independent of the control of the state superintendent and of all local and state education boards. The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts board of directors, which governs and manages the center, is outlined by legislation, and 13 board members are appointed per Louisiana Revised Statute (R.S.) 17:1970.24.

Per R.S. 17:1970.21, NOCCA was created to “. . . enrich the cultural life of Louisiana, to honor the history and contribution of the state to the creative and performing arts, and to provide continuing opportunities for the development of young artists.

The goals of NOCCA are:

- Provide in-depth arts training, instilling in each student a high degree of self-sufficiency;
- Provide experiences that allow students to gain the knowledge and artistic skills necessary for a profession in their chosen arts discipline; and
- Provide students with the skills and ability to make career judgments for themselves, whether in the arts field or outside of the arts field.

Some notable NOCCA alumni include John Batiste (musician); Jeanne-Michele Charbonnet (opera singer); Harry Connick, Jr. (musician and actor); Wendell Pierce (actor); Nicole Cooley (novelist and poet); Terrance Osborne (visual artist); Anthony Mackie (film and Broadway actor); Gary Solomon, Jr. (theatre design); Terence Blanchard (musician); and Branford, Wynton, and Jason Marsalis (musicians).



## APPENDIX D: ACADEMIC STUDIO AND ARTS PROGRAM

### *Academic Studio*

Students enrolled in the Academic Studio are taught through a variety of non-traditional methods that emphasize “collaboration, project-based learning, inquiry, and critical thinking.”<sup>3</sup> In addition to their arts discipline credits, students in the Academic Studio take two integrated academic courses per year:

- Integrated Humanities I through IV and
- Integrated Sciences I through IV

The Integrated Humanities combine the study of English and History, while the Integrated Sciences combine Math and Science. Students also take two language electives of their choice through online learning (French, Latin, Mandarin, or Spanish), as well as health and physical education electives required for high school graduation and TOPS eligibility, as shown in Exhibit D.

Exhibit D - NOCCA Course Curriculum				
	English/ History	Math/Science	Elective 1	Elective 2
<b>Grade 9</b>	Integrated Humanities I	Integrated Sciences I	Language 1	N/A*
<b>Grade 10</b>	Integrated Humanities II	Integrated Sciences II	Language 2	Health (1/2 credit)
<b>Grade 11</b>	Integrated Humanities III	Integrated Sciences III		Physical Education
<b>Grade 12</b>	Integrated Humanities IV	Integrated Sciences IV		
*For the 2015-16 school year, NOCCA has included Physical Education as a course elective. <b>Source:</b> Information provided by NOCCA administration				

<sup>3</sup> [www.nocca.com](http://www.nocca.com)

### *Enrollment Lottery Process*

NOCCA has limited enrollment spaces available for incoming Academic Studio students. A public Enrollment Lottery is held if there are more qualified candidates accepted into the arts program requesting Academic Studio admission than there are available enrollment spaces. Individuals are selected using a statistical process known as stratified random sampling. The sampling method is designed so that all 11 art disciplines may be represented in the selection process. For the 2014-15 school year, 70 freshmen were selected through the lottery from a pool of 94 qualified applicants.

### *Arts Program*

Per NOCCA management, its arts program provides professional-level training that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction. Through NOCCA arts classes, students receive a hands-on artist-teacher mentorship learning and preparatory performance experience. Additionally, NOCCA instructors utilize their artistic abilities professionally and are able to interweave practical experiences with textbook learning.

Master classes are another unique component of the arts training at NOCCA. Master classes are classes taught at NOCCA by alumni, working artists, or educators who are experts in their field. The classes provide a unique classroom opportunity for students to interact with professional artists in their field of study and receive feedback. The classes vary in duration, ranging from one class, to one week, or possibly a month. These classes may be offered free by visiting artists, but the majority is paid from student departmental fees arranged by faculty or the department.

*During the 2014-15 school year, Harry Connick, Jr. (Grammy Award-winning artist), Wendell Pierce (Broadway performer and actor), and Ana Gasteyer (Saturday Night Live, 1996-2002) conducted master classes at NOCCA free of charge.*

The NOCCA Institute also brings artists into the classroom through an Artists-in-Residence Program. These artists enhance and expand the NOCCA curriculum exposing students and faculty to new artistic processes. Approximately 150 artists are brought into NOCCA classrooms every year. The artists provide their unique professional experiences and stories of their exposure to both prestigious current artists and, sometimes, legendary past performers. Through this, students are able to recognize and appreciate the history of the disciplines in which they participate while, at the same time, stimulating their developing creative abilities.



## APPENDIX E: NOCCA INSTITUTE CONTRIBUTIONS

During the 2014-15 school year, the Institute awarded \$114,416 to students via its Term-Time Financial Aid Program and \$36,632 in Summer Study Aid. Eligible NOCCA students receive financial assistance from the NOCCA Institute for classes and workshops. Student eligibility for financial assistance is determined by the NOCCA Institute based on need and availability of funds.

- Term-Time Aid is funding for eligible students used during the school year for department fees, supplies, private lessons, and other student training needs. Aid may include funds for costumes, specialized dance footwear, musical scripts, scores, sheet music, licensing fees for musical production, acrylic and oil paint, digital drawing tablets, and etching supplies.
- Summer Study Aid enables eligible NOCCA students to further their artistic development at arts-training programs across the country. For the 2015 summer, 20 students received awards to attend programs including the Joffrey Ballet School West LA Summer Intensive Program (Los Angeles, CA), Boston University Tanglewood Young Artist Vocal Program (Boston, MA), School of Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, IL), Tulane School of Architecture (New Orleans, LA), and the Collaborative Arts Program 21 (New York, NY).

For more information about the Institute, go to [www.noccainstitute.com](http://www.noccainstitute.com).